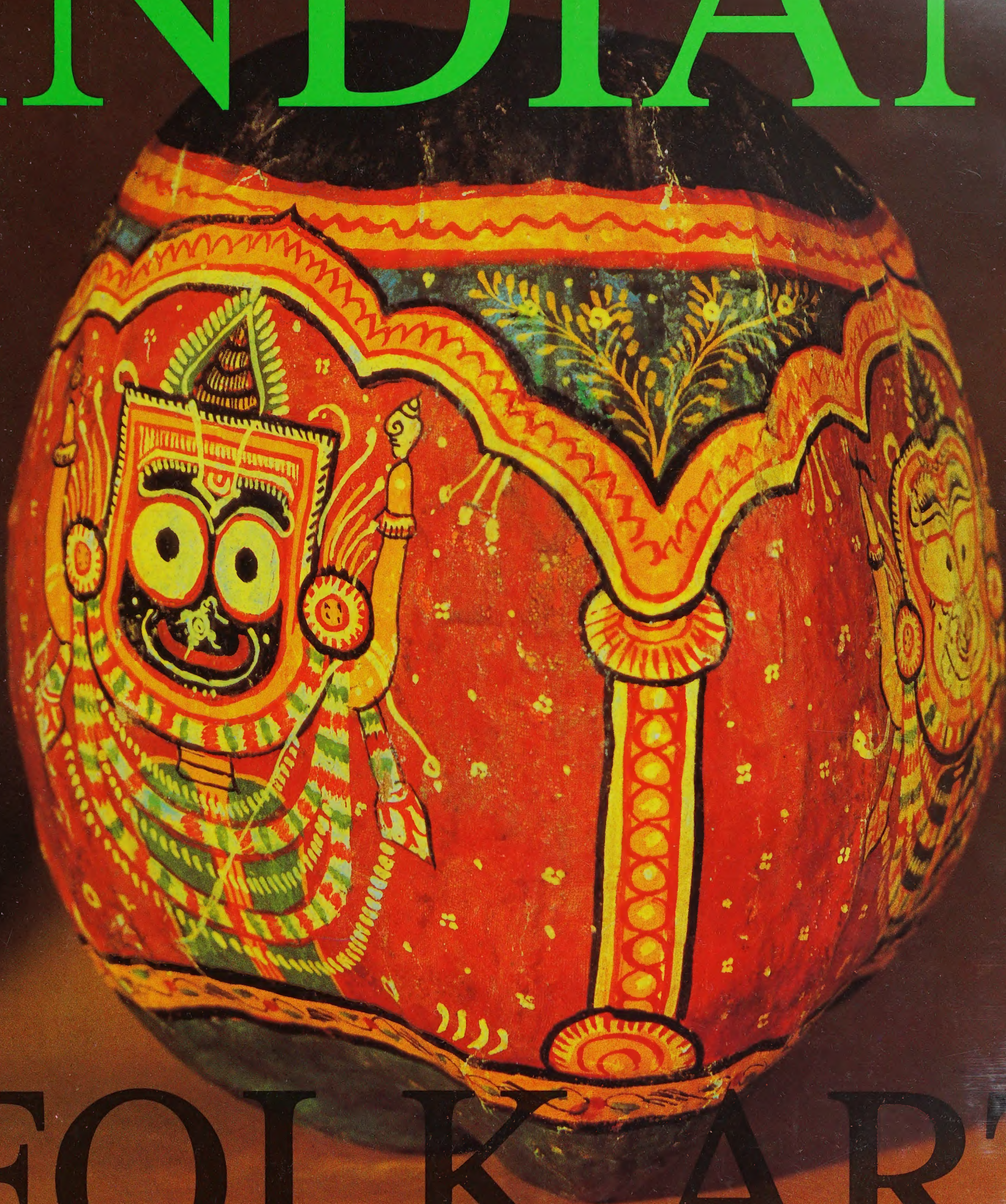


# INDIAN



# FOLK ART



The cultural development of India spans a period of more than ten thousand years. From the beginning, folk art—as distinct from the art of the royal courts and temple towns—has played a constant and important role. The influence of folk art upon the Indian cultural sphere remains no less potent today than in the past. *Indian Folk Art* represents the first attempt to present this history: first, as an uninterrupted tradition extending back more than twelve millennia and second, as the art of the Indian people in the broadest sense—the people who first settled the subcontinent.


In its predilection for line drawing and engraving and for overall designs in both painting and textiles, Indian folk art is distinctive. Another important and clearly discernible characteristic of folk art is its marked tendency to return again and again to the same images and motifs, the meaning of which varies in accordance with changed historical circumstances. Ranging from themes that embrace personifications of the forces of nature, symbols of abundance and fecundity, to visual interpretations of the pantheon of celestial beings, the depth of religious experience shows its profound influence on the popular art. The author also demonstrates that, in the light of new evidence of the earliest examples of Indian art that have emerged in recent decades, women should be accorded a far higher place in Indian culture than has hitherto been assigned to them. In Indian classical art, women were generally regarded chiefly as sources of inspiration. In Indian folk art, on the other hand, they were creative and exceptionally important contributors to the formation and preservation of the country's cultural character, and the chief custodians of India's age-old artistic heritage.

THE AUTHOR, PROFESSOR HEINZ MODE, was born in Berlin in 1913. Educated in Berlin (1931/32), Colombo (1932/33), Calcutta and Santini Ketan (1934) and Basel (1936–1939), he was awarded a doctoral degree from Basel in 1939. Heinz Mode is Professor of Oriental Archaeology at the University of Halle, East Germany. He is the author of many books.









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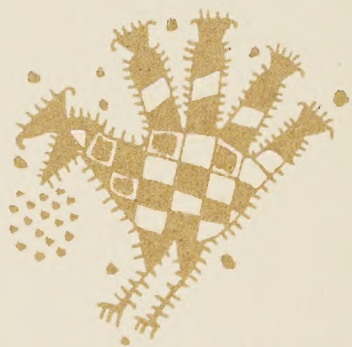


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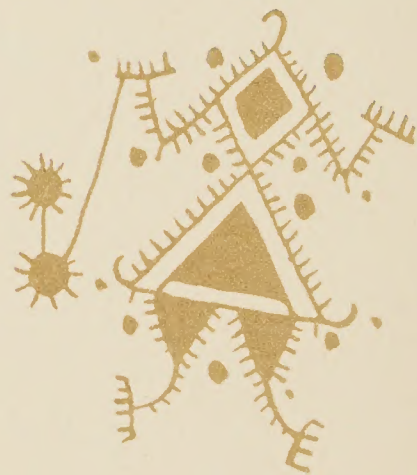
# INDIAN FOLK ART



Heinz Mode/Subodh Chandra



# INDIAN







# FOLK ART

With 68 colour  
and 122 black-and-white photographs  
and 206 illustrations in the text



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Translated from the German  
by Peter and Betty Ross

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State frontier  
not exactly fixed state frontier  
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Varanasi

BIHAR

BANGLA DESH

Calcutta

BENGAL

BURMA

GUJARAT

Ahmedabad

MADHYA PRADESH

Narmada

MAHARASHTRA

Bombay

Godavari

Hyderabad

ANDHRA

Krishna

PRADESH

GOA

KARNA-  
TAKA

Bangalore

Madras

TAMIL  
NADU

KERALA

SRI  
LANKA

Bay of Bengal

Arabian  
Sea



# Foreword

*Kathasarit sagara*, the title of a voluminous work of Indian classical literature, signifies “ocean fed by the rivers of story and legend”. In the same way, Indian folk art might be likened to an ocean which, since earliest times, has been fed by the rivers of popular artistic creativity—rivers that have flowed into it from all parts of the subcontinent. This, merely by way of a warning to the interested reader that, given the oceanic dimensions of Indian representational art and its many, diverse and ebullient tributaries, our text and illustrations can offer little more than a brief excursion along the banks of one small rivulet to the shores fringing the ocean of contemporary Indian folk art.

The choice of plates has been confined almost exclusively to those works found in Indian museums and private collections, or such as have been temporarily displayed at exhibitions where, however, provenance and date of origin have, alas, all too often been inadequately indicated. In the course of many journeys, a well-known photographer, Subodh Chandra of Bombay, has documented that folk art and discovered, besides works that are already known, other interesting material, some of it new and as yet unpublished, and some that is by no means readily accessible. At this point the author would like to express his gratitude, not only to Subodh Chandra, but also to the many institutions and collectors who have placed their art objects at his disposal.

Again, the plates are to be regarded as a more or less independent entity, whose subject is art from India and art in India. Indian government institutions and Indian collectors and art lovers have provided invaluable assistance, while an Indian photographer has served as the interpreter of his country’s folk art. That the whole is governed by the rubric “with and for India”, is something which cannot be too strongly emphasized, for ever since his youth the author has felt himself bound up with and indebted to that country as to a second home. This also explains why recourse has not been had to valuable stocks of Indian folk art in other countries. The very few exceptions to this consist mainly of illustrations to the text.

In the case of Indian terms, diacritical signs have been omitted as largely irrelevant in the present context. Unless otherwise stated, the objects depicted in the plates are of twentieth century origin. A chronology of the art of rock painting is to be found in Figs. 47 and 48.

The publications (up to the year 1981) included in the bibliography cover a wider field than does the text, since the somewhat narrow limits imposed upon the latter permit little more than an incidental discussion of aspects of folk art and crafts such as individual techniques, materials and local peculiarities, and precludes wide-ranging comparisons.

No absolute claims are made in respect of our method of presentation which, together

with the definitions it involves, differs in many respects from that employed in earlier works on Indian folk art. All too few of the latter have treated folk art as true art, nor have they attempted to see it in historical perspective. But the richness of popular artistic production is such that it behoves us to recall our opening metaphor. Yet it would be presumptuous to take in, as it were, at a single glance and endeavour to define in terms of figures and facts, the full depth and extent of an entire ocean, or to assess its true proportions. We can only wait and hope that others will feel inspired to follow up our observations and to think, as we do, “with and for India”.

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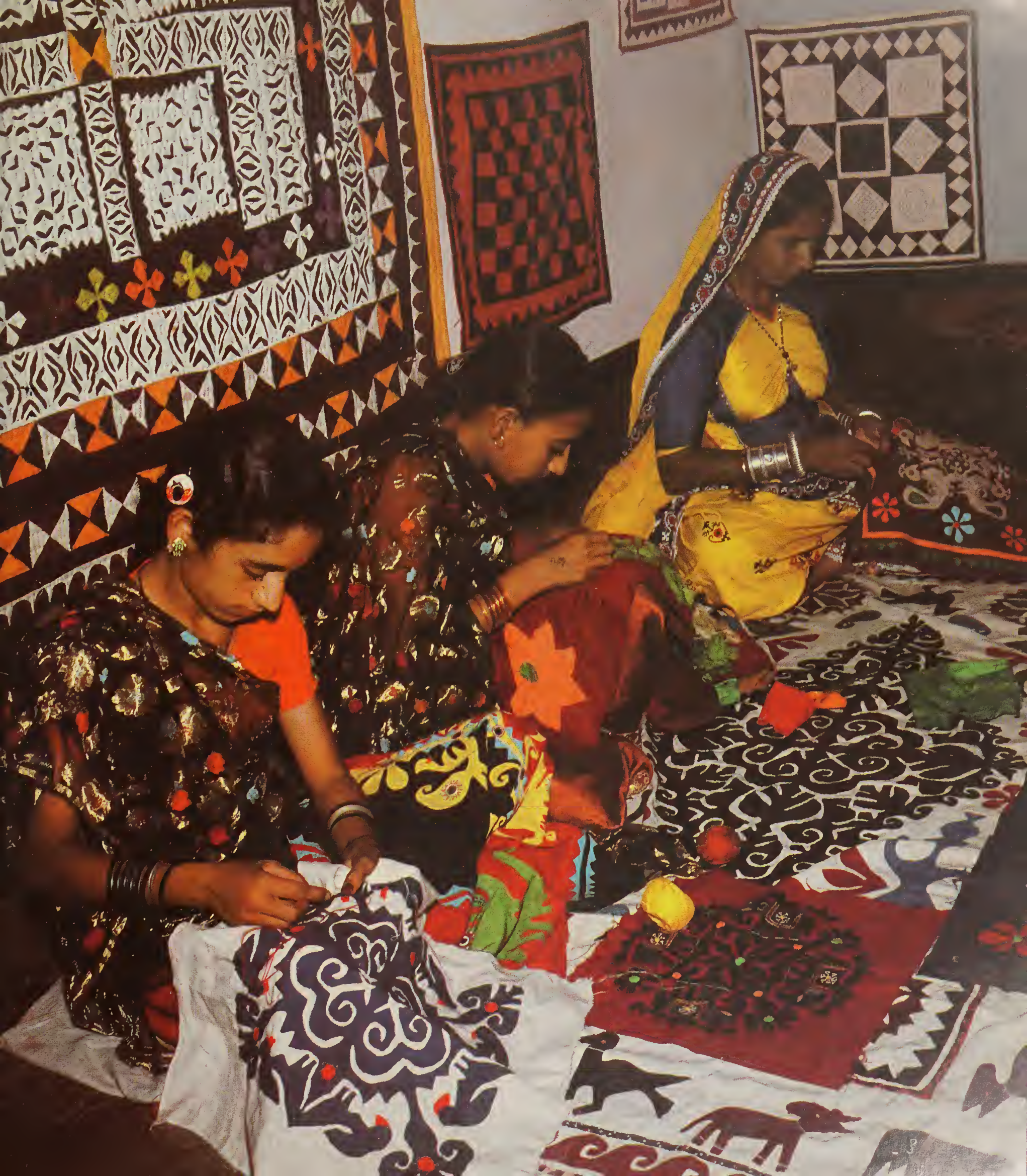
1 Women engaged on appliqué work. Gujarat.

Following pages:

2 Wool-spinning. Kutch, Gujarat.

3 Winding yarn. Gujarat.















4 Puppet-maker. Rajasthan.

5 Weaver. Assam.











6 Potter modelling a terracotta relief. Rajasthan.





**7** Finishing touches being given to a terracotta sculpture.  
Tamil Nadu.

Following pages:

**8** Vessel for storing grain. Clay and split bamboo.  
Produced by the women of the village of Bakharla,  
Gujarat, height 3 m or more.

**9** Woman wearing an embroidered bodice and  
a multiplicity of ornaments. Gujarat.

**10** Harjilal Bhopa, a painter of the traditional  
school.  
Amer, Rajasthan.

**11** Woman engaged in making a preliminary  
sketch on paper. Madhubani, Bihar.























# Significance and Characteristic Features of Indian Folk Art

The Indian plastic and pictorial arts, of unimaginable antiquity, have over the millennia and up till the present day, evinced a continuity that has survived every historical, socio-economic and political development to produce an art that is specifically Indian. In this process, the history and characteristic features of folk art will be seen to have played a singularly important role. Its origins go back to the art of primitive society, while its persistence is attested by what is a by no means rare manifestation, namely the survival of Indian tribal communities which have succeeded in preserving their respective cultural identities in the very heart of the developed Hindu community of today. On the subcontinent, as in Africa and Oceania, tribal art (or traditional art, as it is sometimes known), bears the unmistakable stamp of an achievement that is not only ancient and indigenous, but also notably creative.

As much as five thousand years ago, India possessed the rudiments of a more advanced social and political development. Here, as in Egypt and the Near East, there arose the early oriental form of a class society with a high urban civilization, a wide and well-organized network of long-distance trade and correspondingly extensive cultural contacts. This early Indian phase of

political development known, after the place where the first finds were made, as the Harappan culture, has also been called the Indusian civilization<sup>1</sup> because of its geographical centre, the great archaeological sites on the banks of the Indus in Pakistan. The artistic and cultural development of this area was intimately related to that of all the other parts of the subcontinent as, indeed, it continued to be even under British colonial rule. Hence it is customary to use Pakistan as a source of comparative material as and where necessary. The sites known to us today as repositories of Harappan art are not confined solely to the geographical limits of the Indus Basin, but are found much further afield—to the east as far as the region around Delhi, the Indian capital, and, to the south-west, along the shores of the Arabian Sea, as far as Bombay.

The art of this earliest phase of Indian urban culture sprang from the still earlier traditions of peasant-village art which, in various local guises, had made its appearance in all parts of the subcontinent with the gradual sedentarization of the hunters and food gatherers whose art is of even older provenance. Yet in this field, also, notable progress has been made in India during the past few decades as regards dating, geographical distribution and fresh discoveries.

Needless to say, the art of the hunters and food gatherers, of the earliest peasant settlers and of the urban dwellers of the Harappan culture, while forming part of a

continuous chain of development, is in each case comprehensible only when considered in the context of changing economic and social circumstances. Not only prior to, but also during the earlier phases of the class society, all art was functional or, one might say, utilitarian, no matter whether its object was to give aesthetic shape to tools and articles of everyday use, or to bolster the ideology of social structures by the production of ritual objects and paintings.

In using the term Indian folk art, then, we take as our point of departure the earliest period of Indian history, a period in which art was the art of the people and in which, from the point of view of social structure, all individuals and groups of the population were both able and entitled to engage in crafts and to employ the functional and aesthetic objects thus produced. It was not until the birth of peasant-village art, when the hitherto nomadic groups of the tribal population had begun to settle that the process known as the division of labour set in, a process which, in urban Harappan art, was to become even more marked and to give birth to the specialized crafts.

In India such historical processes are not peculiar to the past, nor are they by any means unique, for they constantly recur so that even today various stages of which might be called suspended historical development continue to exist alongside one another. The contemporary tribal artist, for instance, may produce works which diverge

[1] RUBEN, W., *Kulturgeschichte Indiens*, Berlin, 1980. Earliest periods: *Indus civilization* (also in English translation, *Indusian Civilization*), *Harappa-Zivilisation*.





widely from those of his counterpart in the villages. Different social factors are involved here—on the one hand, we have the adherence on the part of the many clans to ideas (i.e. totemism, shamanism, or magic) uninfluenced by the higher religions, on the other, a close commitment on the part of peasant-village culture to the Hinduism which prevails today.

Such differences are not insuperable, nor has the process of adaptation and integration ever ceased. Every so often, and with increasing frequency today, tribal structures suddenly collapse in the face of an abrupt transition to the industrial proletariat, and of absorption into modern industrial society. Thus, two types of confrontation are discernible: the first, now increasingly rare, between the earliest tribal culture and Indian high culture (a generally accepted and conveniently concise, if somewhat misleading term which we shall here use to describe the Brahmanic-Buddhist cultural phase engendered in new and more vigorous form in the Ganges Valley by the still seminal artistic and cultural achievements initiated during the Harappan period); the second, perpetuated ever since the Harappan period, between the peasant-village

culture and the aforementioned predominantly urban Indian high culture.

The Indian village of today bears little resemblance to its predecessor of about four thousand years ago. Even the earliest villages reflect the transition to a class society. Yet the bulk of early village artefacts, such as painted vessels or terracotta figurines, may be described as genuine folk art in the original sense of the term in that they antedated the class society and were therefore the concern of the community as a whole. As time went on, however, the cultural isolation of most of the villages decreased in proportion to their growing contacts with the towns, and consequently with the culture of the great temple complexes and the royal courts which represented the then prevailing phase of Indian high art. Practically no aspect of village culture or tribal life remained untouched as cultural exchanges and reciprocal influences of all kinds between folk art and high art came to be the general rule. And it is in accordance with a trait that is peculiarly Indian that this process should have taken and should still be taking place by comparatively slow degrees.

Another characteristic factor which has played an equally important role in the art of India over several thousand years of development is that country's geography. In the cultural and historical sense as here understood India constitutes a vast subcontinent of strongly contrasting physical features and corresponding variations in climate, agronomy and settlement potential. Thousands of kilometres separate the Himalayas at the northern extremity from Cape Comorin, the southernmost tip of the subcontinent that is laterally intersected by great rivers, most of which flow from west to east. It is similarly divided into northern and southern zones by mountain ranges, the north deriving its character from the

Ganges and the extensive plain formed by that river, while the south is divided longitudinally by mountain ranges into a central tableland flanked by coastal strips to east and west. Yet physical barriers in the shape of mountains and oceans have to a large extent preserved India's geographical unity and integrity; it is as it were a reservoir rather than a conduit. By comparison with neighbouring countries, it has acquired a relatively stable and independent civilization thanks to five thousand years of urban cultural development since the Harappan period and to the infinitely longer space of time that has elapsed since the cultural phases of the paleolithic, mesolithic and neolithic eras.

On the other hand, the Indian subcontinent has seen the rise of distinctive provinces and states, each with its own political and cultural history and specific characteristics



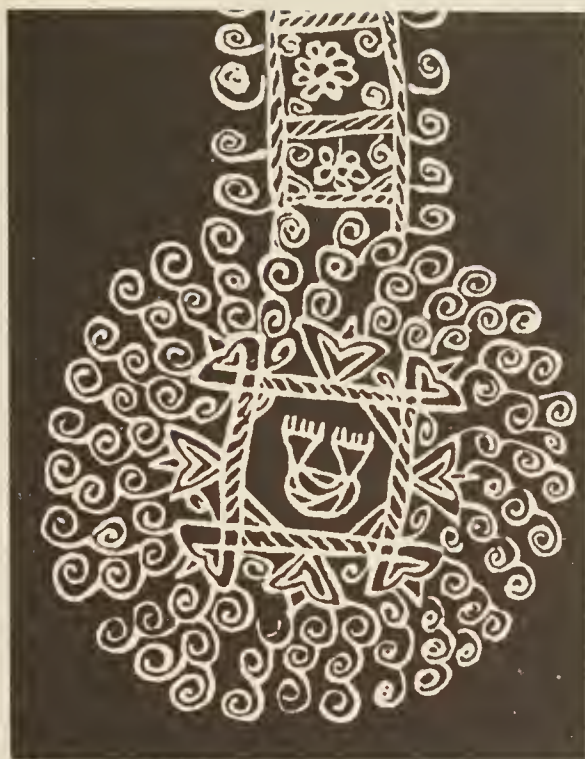
13 Woman and children.

Alpona, executed in rice paste on levelled ground by non-professional women painters. Bengal.

14 Auspicious symbols for the goddess Lakshmi.

Alpona executed by women on a low wooden seat. Bengal.





which must be seen within the context of the unity alluded to above. Political events and, more notably, socio-economic developments, have set their stamp on the respective cultures of these Indian states, and not

[2] ROTHERMUND, D., "Regionale Schwerpunkte der indischen Geschichte", in: *Indo-Asia*, 17. 3. 1975, pp. 249 ff.

least upon their art. Needless to say, court art was far more intimately bound up with such individual developments than was folk art, the latter remaining virtually unaffected either by the short-term political consequences of competition between princely courts in avid pursuit of prestige or by the processes arising out of the differences between the high religions of India. Thus, in the long term, the continued independent development and recognizably local character of folk art in any given region was not determined by the narrow confines of state or province but, rather, given stable conditions, by supraregional and, in particular, socio-economic factors such as climate, the nature of the soil, the routes taken by hunters and food gatherers and the potential for agricultural settlement. The attempt to place Indian folk art in historical perspective is in no way made easier by such considerations which invalidate, or at any rate diminish the relevance of the whole apparatus, so painfully assembled, upon which the dynastic history of India has hitherto been based.

Attempts have already been made to divide up the Indian subcontinent into historico-geographical centres of influence<sup>2</sup>, e.g. a northern region, an upland region and an East coast region, each having four subdivisions. In the course of Indian dynastic history, all these zones remained well-defined centres of power of which the borders, however, did not always coincide with those of individual states and bore no relation whatever to those of the Indian Federal States of today. One stretch of country, however, known as the intermediate zone and lying roughly between Gujarat in the west and Orissa in the east, has been excluded from the above schema on the grounds that no centre of political relevance to the other regions of India had ever arisen there. Its exclusion from the course of dynastic de-



velopment is interesting in the context of this book in view of the area's undeniable importance in the field of folk art, not only in earlier times, but also in the present day. Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa were, as they still continue to be, important centres of folk art in our definition of the term. This is where the majority of the tribal communities settled and where their descendants are still at work as creative artists today; here, too, fresh examples of archaic rock paintings are constantly being brought to light. Thus, the attempt, just considered, to subdivide the country into political spheres of influence might be seen as a sort of antithesis to the historico-regional view of Indian folk art we propose to adopt in the ensuing chapters.

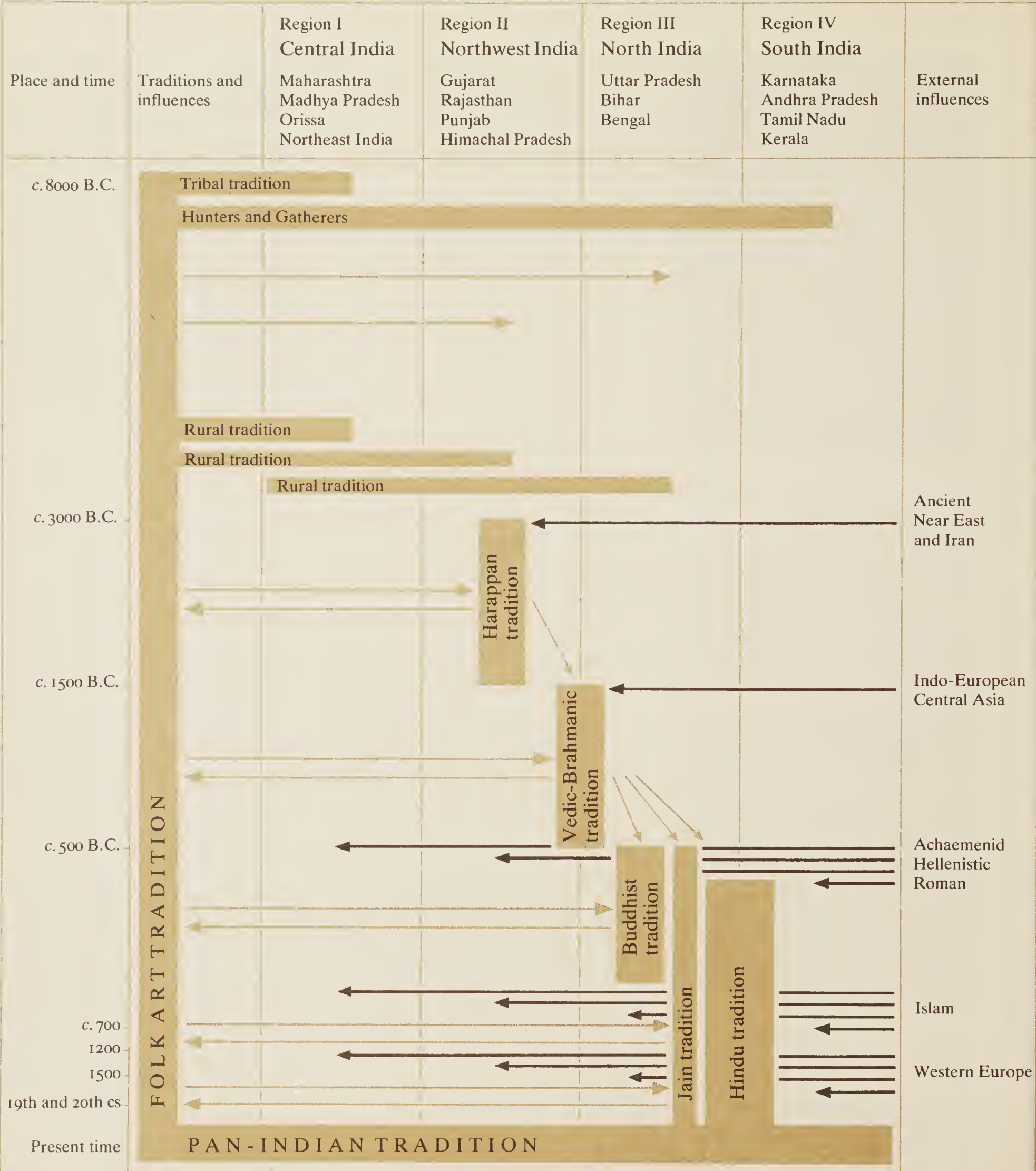
Our table represents an attempt to set out in diagrammatic form the regional and chronological milestones in the history of Indian folk art, whilst at the same time indicating not only the major epochs of the history of Indian civilization from the Harappan period onwards during which the foundations of high art were laid, but also India's contacts with the civilizations of other coun-

15 Floral pathway for the goddess Lakshmi. Painting executed by non-professional women artists. Himachal Pradesh.

16 Swirling lotuses for the goddess Lakshmi; bottom right: The goddess's footprints. Alpona, executed by non-professional women painters. Bengal.

17 Footprints indicating the presence of the goddess Lakshmi. Alpona, painted by women on a ritual stool. Bengal.







tries. Though somewhat rough and ready, the table may help to elucidate the definitions previously set forth in connection with our views on the antiquity and continuity of tradition in Indian folk art, and the relationship between this last and high art, as well as their interdependence and reciprocal influences.

The historical sequence will be far more readily discernible in our table than it is in the kind of schema which has largely prevailed hitherto, that is the juxtaposition in accordance with the place of origin, of the categories such as tribal or peasant-village, or again of different periods of high civilization. Only a lay-out in which historical data are presented vertically and geographical data horizontally, so that they may be seen in conjunction, can provide an overall view of Indian art and culture. Moreover it reveals that folk art alone is capable of combining the two modes of presentation—the vertical and the horizontal—to produce a synthesis of Indian art. The elements that go to make up pure folk art, an essential component of Indian art as a whole, have progressed through three successive stages:

- 1) an original, primitive phase prior to the advent of the class society;
- 2) a phase of reciprocal interchanges with Indian high art lasting from the Harappan period to the start of the colonial era;
- 3) a more recent and still continuing phase of Indian art in which folk art is discernible, not only as an historically integrated factor but also as a more or less autonomous branch of artistic activity in its various local manifestations.

[3] ELWIN, V., *The Tribal Art of Middle India*, London, 1951, p. 3; cf. also MOCKERJEE, A., *Indian Primitive Art*, Calcutta, 1959, pp. 19 ff. for further examples; also KRAMRISCH, S., *Unknown India, Ritual Art in Tribe and Village*, Philadelphia, 1968, p. 51 (Catalogue): "Low-caste Hindu potters work for them."

Methodological considerations demand that we combine what are no more than fragmentary documents of the past—rock paintings, pots and isolated archaeological finds—with the still living vernacular arts and crafts of the present to form an overall picture of Indian folk art and, by extension, of the main lines along which Indian art as a whole has developed. Only by so doing can we avoid the risk of laying undue emphasis on and thus overrating the role played by high art in the history of Indian art. Unlike the high art of the princely courts and of the temples of the orthodox religions, whose monuments were for the most part intended to withstand the ravages of time, the art produced by the people, i.e. by tribal or peasant craftsmen, has, save for form and content, been very largely ephemeral.

For on the whole the materials used by the folk artist are not only perishable, but they are also easily destroyed. Indeed, we know that much of what is produced in this field today is in fact destined for eventual destruction. The usefulness of such objects expires once they have served their ritual and religious purpose. Sculptures and paintings produced specifically for domestic or public festivities are completely disregarded once these are over. They are laid aside or thrown into a river or the sea, while the murals and the paintings on mud floors outside the houses are left to fade in the sun and crumble away in the rain. Continuity in folk art is achieved solely by means of constant repetition and reproduction. Thus a modern work of folk art may also be regarded to some extent as an indirect source of information on the folk art of earlier periods, thanks to the continuity resulting from perpetual reproduction.

Within the village we may discern distinctive groups whose members qualify as producers of works of art. To begin with there are the professional craftsmen who belong

to a caste and are therefore governed by one of India's high religions; their artefacts are produced for local consumption and, to a lesser extent, for use in trade or barter. The next largest group in the village consists of amateurs—non-professional artists, most of them women who follow their own traditions in the pursuit of an art that is domestic and ritualistic. As used here, in the context of Indian folk art, the term "amateur production" merely serves to distinguish this activity from the work of the professional craftsman and in no way implies the practice of art as a leisure occupation or hobby.

The occupation of the workman whose craft is linked to a particular caste is handed down from father to son, and craftsmen have always been recruited from the villages by princes, municipalities and religious bodies to work on their ambitious artistic undertakings. While materials and techniques are commensurate with the particular stage of development reached by any one village, outside commissions, today ever more numerous, increasingly demand the use of materials not normally called for by the modest requirements of the villagers. Although the caste of the artist-craftsman means that he is intimately bound up with his faith, there appears to be no religious restrictions upon his professional activities. In this respect he is a free agent who may undertake work for anyone, irrespective of caste or religion. Thus tribal members may commission work from Hindu craftsmen, who, for their part, show themselves in every respect capable of meeting down to the last detail their customers' requirements in regard to style, form and content. Indeed, they may be called upon to produce images of deities and of ritual objects differing in every respect from those made for village consumption or in response to the requirements of courts and temples.<sup>3</sup>





It may be supposed that the tribal population increasingly lost their technical and artistic skills, having been, perhaps, denied the opportunity of practising them by the Hindu village craftsmen. Hence the real provenance of any particular piece, such as an exhibit in a museum, can seldom be ascertained with any degree of certainty. Moreover its original function becomes extinct once the artefact has served its purpose and the religious ceremony has been performed.

The outer forms, the material and the iconographic details are preserved, but the object itself has lost its inherent meaning and may be reduced to a plaything while not, for all that, lending itself to classification as a toy. For on the one hand the secularization of an object is generally of secondary importance and, on the other, the

manufacture of figurines and other objects for use by children has never constituted a separate branch of craft production. Children are potential grown-ups and their requirements and capabilities are carefully nurtured with an eye to their participating in the life of the community.

As already mentioned, the second largest group of craftworkers in the village consists of women whose artistic activities are bound up with home and family. Their work has never been of a commercial nature, if we except certain more recent developments, but rather has been regarded as a typically female occupation on a par with all their other domestic duties. Hitherto their materials and techniques have always been of purely local origin and hence adapted to the modest requirements of private domestic use. The relatively modest nature of their

media, however, should in no circumstances be allowed to influence our estimate of the quality of their artistic output. The amateur production of these women relates largely to ritual, or perhaps we should say, magical ideas and is directed towards obtaining results which they hope will promote the welfare of the family. Being made of perishable material, their products have a limited life. The continuity of this form of art has persisted through generations, passing from mother to daughter and is assured, both as regards techniques and content, by the transmission of an uninterrupted sequence of experience. It is thus conducive both to a strong adherence to tradition, and to the perpetual reproduction and repetition of artefacts which differ very little one from the other. The historical development of professional village craftsmanship, like its content, tends towards Indian high art, whereas the distinctive nature of female domestic art is reminiscent rather of the earliest beginnings of artistic activity, as are its absolute fidelity to tradition, its unsophisticated, aesthetic, non-industrial creativity and its conservative techniques in which recourse is had only to the simplest natural materials. All this brings it far closer to tribal art than the caste-restricted craftsmanship of the men. In the amateur production of the Indian housewife today we may see a reflection of the earliest type of India's pre-historic folk art.

The contributions made by the Indians themselves to our understanding of their history has, at any rate in the past, been very small. In the light of our present knowledge it may be surmised that problems concerned with the process of historical growth and development were of small interest to a people to whom the past was ever present and to whom antiquity, elsewhere regarded as extinct, was a living entity. The synchronic view, in which today, yesterday and

18 Alakshmi, goddess of poverty.  
Floor painting executed by women. Kumaon.  
Uttar Pradesh.



the day before yesterday form a homogeneous whole, must necessarily blur the true historical sequence, presenting it rather as an enduring reality of perpetual synchronicity, as something given and immutable. Men lacked the inspiration or, to use a modern term, motivation, that might have induced them to inquire into the course of their history, its laws and causality. However, now that critical historical research has long occupied an honourable place in Indian scholarship, it is all the more imperative that we incorporate in this historical survey the source material provided by contemporary writings. This brings us back to the crucial question of the definition of Indian folk art and of the historical criteria to be applied to it.

In India today we have at our disposal a superabundance of folk art material, representing the end-product of what is an historical development. As we have already mentioned, archaeological finds have enabled us to distinguish relatively clearly the earliest manifestations of folk art for which we possess evidence that is duly authenticated and historically documented, though here again, hypothetical explanations and conclusions are, of course, unavoidable, given the perishable nature of the materials employed. Over long periods the history of Indian folk art must be traced in indirect references and in what can be gleaned from its reflection in works of high art—architecture, sculpture and painting—or from the sparse allusions to the subject found in early writings.

The most important artistic link between past and present consists in a number of decorative motifs, attributes and symbols, motifs which regularly recur and can be shown to have remained constant throughout, although the message they carry may vary from epoch to epoch. They constitute what might be described as a formal, struc-



tural framework of tradition, the only pitfall here being that the visual message, though apparently easy to read, nevertheless admits of a number of different interpretations. The inner logic of historical processes

would seem to suggest that, in each concrete instance, this clarity of the visual image should be placed within the context of the conventions prevalent at the time. There can be no doubt, however, that in the art of

19 Auspicious wall painting for a bridal couple.  
Executed by women. Bilaspur, Himachal Pradesh.





20 Harvest.  
Detail from a Warli painting, Maharashtra.





21 Country scene.  
Detail of a Warli painting on canvas. Maharashtra.



today symbols such as the sun and the moon lend themselves to a different interpretation from that applicable in, say, a community, of hunters and food gatherers. By and large, it may be said that the outward, formal manifestations of folk art are more readily comprehensible than is its actual significance. However, this observation need not discourage us unduly. While detailed historical knowledge may prove elusive, the same cannot be said of the existence of a folk art whose forms are known to go far back into the past and whose evaluation, if it is to make sense at all, must primarily be considered in terms of the present. It follows that so far as our own times are concerned and seen in the light of contemporary Indian conventions, folk art is also wholly explicable in terms of content. However, the historian is not alone in encountering obstacles in this field; frustrations also await the "art sociologist", call him what we will, in his consideration of the folk art of today and that of the more immediate past. Yet the problems which bedevil a critique of contemporary folk art are of quite a different kind.

For instance it has to be asked what is to be regarded as genuine folk art at a time when industrial production has left no part of the country untouched, having long since invaded even the villages where ancient traditions have been overlaid by the influences of imported foreign wares, or adapted to meet the requirements of mass production for export and the tourist trade, with a consequent loss both of content and of function. The past few decades have seen a steady increase in sharp practice in this lucrative field of operations and it has become by no means unusual for a factory-made product to be enticingly labelled "folk art". It is fortunate indeed that in India this process has been fairly slow by comparison with many other countries and has not led even



22 Wedding scene.  
Folk drawing by a Kayashtha woman. Madhubani,  
Bihar.



today to the total extinction of creative indigenous folk art. National renewal after centuries of foreign dominion has also lent strength to the arms of those who are aware of the historical, traditional and creative value of folk art and are concerned to preserve and promote the latter as conducive to a consciousness of national identity. Their influence on the arts and crafts, reinforced by government and other official backing, should not be underestimated. Successful attempts are being made to preserve and, where necessary, revive the genuine, traditional arts and crafts as forming the basis of the folk art tradition with its formal continuity or, better, its own self-perpetuating formal vocabulary. Again, research establishments, associations for the promotion of folk art, and institutions such as museums have undertaken learned studies in an attempt to provide models and thus help to perpetuate genuine Indian folk art. Indeed, some of the more progressive Indian artists of today are very much aware of the extent to which they are dependent on its survival. How far back can contemporary folk art be said to go? A fair number of pieces dating back to the nineteenth if not the eighteenth century is still to be found in collections, and it is these we should consider rather than more recent examples in which the influence of industrial mass production is more strongly in evidence. Whole fields of folk art may suddenly come to light, as did, a few decades ago, the brilliantly animated paintings executed by non-professional women artists in Mithila (Bihar), an instance which, however, also typifies the rapidity with which such a discovery may be robbed of its original significance by the intrusion of external factors, not least the rapacity of ingenious entrepreneurs. The fashionable demand for these paintings by women has meant that the artists, compelled to step up production, have had to skimp their work. It



has also meant that even in this field of Indian folk art so long untainted by commerce, there has been a loss of integrity, if not an actual distortion of traditional forms. To say that Indian folk art was firmly ensconced in the many hundreds of thousands of villages of this vast country and, as the above-mentioned women's paintings in Bihar also go to show, still is so ensconced, is not to relegate the towns solely to spheres of influence represented by the

patronage of princely courts and orthodox temples. From finds dating back to the Harappan period it is evident that Indian folk art is also an urban phenomenon which, moreover, at a relatively early stage in history, already formed part and parcel of the development of the towns.

Even the largest of Indian cities still contains village elements—not, of course, within the socio-economic structure proper to a metropolis but, as it were, in the



23 Nuptial wall decoration, executed by women. Mandi, Himachal Pradesh.

24 Birth of Krishna. Drawn in folk art style by Khodidas Parmar. Saurashtra, Gujarat, 16x42 cm.





peripheral sense of an outlook on life; of what might be described as a consciousness born of tradition. This clinging to a traditional and long outdated mode of existence is frequently found within the narrower sphere of the extended family, as also in the newly formed communities of those who have migrated from the villages to the towns. Similarly, it may be shown that the traditional arts, practised by women in the home, continue to survive in the major cities of India.

The same cannot be said of the temporary relegation of the Indian artisan and more especially of the artist and craftsman, from city to village, a process peculiar to the period of British colonial rule, notably during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and now long since reversed. In India, the craftsman, in so far as he continues to exist, does not so much compete with as serve the industrialist in the capacity of supplier and small exporter.



There is very little information to be gleaned from early literary sources on the history and nature of folk art. The very earliest works, such as the poetry of the *Rigveda*, does not provide a complete catalogue of crafts and callings. Thus, while the *Rigveda* mentions the skills of the woodworker, in particular those of the wainwright, as might be expected in the case

of these semi-nomadic cattle breeders of the latter part of the second millennium B.C., it omits all reference to the work of the potter, although archaeological discoveries have shown that the art had already been practised in India for thousands of years.<sup>4</sup> Early Buddhist literature is a source of much detailed information on the work of craftsmen and contains many allusions to

[4] ZIMMER, H., *Altindisches Leben*, Berlin, 1879.

[5] RAU, W., *Staat und Gesellschaft im alten Indien nach den Brāhmana-Texten*, Wiesbaden, 1957. Also FICK, R., *Die soziale Gliederung im nordöstlichen Indien zu Buddha's Zeit*, Kiel, 1897, Chapter 10, "Die Gilden der Kaufleute und Handwerker"; BASAK, R. G., "Indian Life as revealed in the Buddhist Work, the Mahāvastu-Avadāna", in: J. N. Banerjee *Volume*, Calcutta, 1960, pp. 1-70, esp. pp. 34-41.

[6] For some of the most important publications of this kind, see notes 5 and 8, as also APTE, V. M., *Social and Religious Life in the Gṛhyasutras*, Ahmedabad, 1939; GHOSAL, U. N., *History of Hindu public Life*, Calcutta, 1945; JAIN,

J. C., *Life in Ancient India as Depicted in the Jaina Canons*, Bombay, 1947; MAITY, S. K., *The Economic Life of Northern India in the Gupta Period*, Calcutta, 1957; ASHRAF, K. M., *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan*, Delhi, 1959; SHASTRI, A. M., *India as Seen in the Brhatsamhitā of Varāhamihira*, Varanasi, 1969.

[7] MOOKERJI, R. K., *Notes on Early Indian Art*, Allahabad, 1962, p. 16.

[8] PURI, B. N., *India in the Time of Patanjali*, Bombay, 1968, p. 217.

[9] Shilpanis as works of art in the Aitareya Brahmana, cf. KRAMRISCH, S., *The Hindu Temple*, Calcutta, 1946, I. p. 9 (after COOMARASWAMY, A. K.).

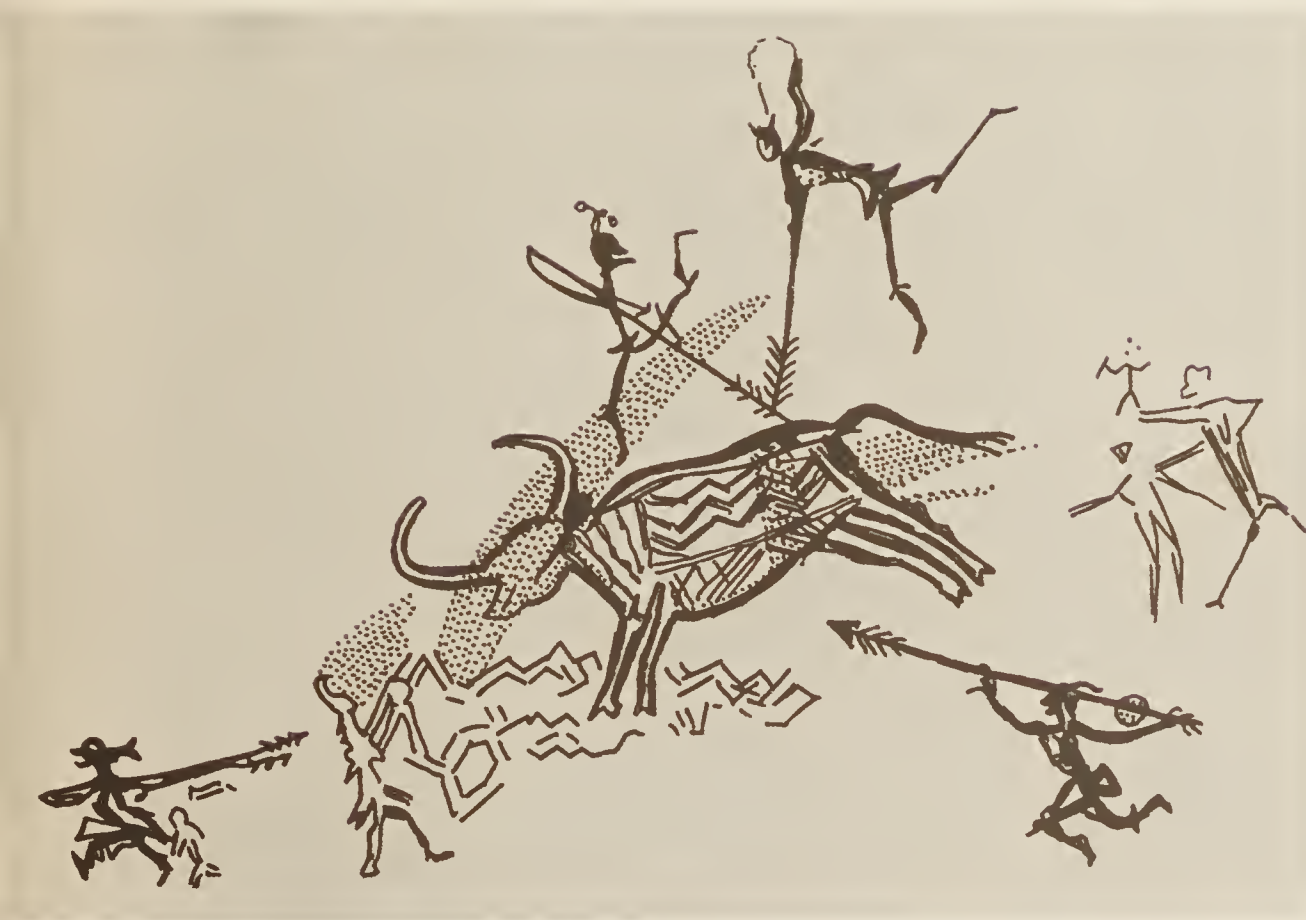




their organization and their local and social obligations as well as accounts of whole craft villages located in the neighbourhood of the larger towns. In the towns themselves craftsmen live in certain districts or streets, while crafts are determined by caste and handed down from father to son.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately little has hitherto been done to exploit in depth and collate, from an historical viewpoint, such information as is available on the evolution of Indian crafts. On the other hand, monographs and learned papers, analyzing a specific epoch in the light of individual works of literature, have provided as it were a series of cross-sections.<sup>6</sup>

The well-known Indian grammarian, Pāṇini, drew a distinction between artists—the *rajashilpi*, or craftsman employed by the court—and the *gramashilpi*, or village craftsman.<sup>7</sup> Originally *shilpin* would seem to have been a term generally applied to the technically trained craftsman; later, however, it came to denote the artisan.<sup>8</sup> Thus the writings concerning the theory of art are referred to collectively as *shilpashastras*.<sup>9</sup> Being for the most part of a highly schematic character, these manuals of artistic instruction could not, of course, be expected



27 Bull vaulting.  
Late mesolithic cave painting, central India.

28 Bull hunting.  
Mesolithic cave painting, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh,  
width of animal 29 cm.

29 Animal-head motif in the form of a swastika.  
Rock painting. Sita Khadi, Madhya Pradesh,  
width of one head 11 cm.





to include a description of folk art or of the amateur art practised by women at home. By and large they form part of orthodox ecclesiastical literature and hence are concerned exclusively with art as the handmaiden of the courts and of Brahmanic orthodoxy.<sup>10</sup>

A comprehensive survey of Indian folk art such as we intend to provide in the chapters that follow cannot, as may be seen from the foregoing, be presented in the form of a continuous history, desirable though that might be. A possibility that immediately suggests itself is an arrangement based on the materials employed, a course frequently adopted in earlier works of a comparable nature. While such an arrangement would, of course, provide the collector with welcome information, it would militate against an historical approach in that it would necessarily be based on a synchronous cross-

section and at best would involve constant repetition if any sort of historical perspective were to be achieved.

Since it is our intention, not only to give depth to the concept of folk art, but also to present it as a genuine art form, we have endeavoured to steer what might be called a middle course between, on the one hand, an historical survey of its development and, on the other, an interpretation in terms of types of material. In so doing we shall discover that Indian folk art evinces an unmistakable preference not only for certain techniques and forms of expression, but also for particular categories of the fine arts.

A thorough consideration of the subject plainly reveals the pre-eminence in folk art of painting, or rather of the technique and artistic mode of expression of the two-dimensional arts, a conclusion which is borne

out both by the earliest available evidence in this field and by its regional distribution. The techniques of painting, weaving and plaiting are to a very great extent founded on folk art tradition, being closely bound up with the latter's symbols, narrative content and pictorial categories. The other branches of folk art—pottery, wood carving, metalwork and, on occasion, stone sculpture—will also be accorded a place in our discussion. This course will be pursued in accordance with the regional subdivisions already outlined, but with particular emphasis on the subject matter and the aesthetico-artistic content of the representations concerned. At the same time due account will be taken of regional history and of the historical sequence of territorially determined processes.

This is neither an easy nor a by any means uncontroversial course. For we have to contend not only with regional differences as such, but also with unevenly distributed research, since scholars have tended to devote more attention to one part of India than to another. Thus works on the folk art of Bengal, including specialist papers on specific types of functions and material, by far outnumber those on the folk art of all the other regions put together, a situation further compounded by the great wealth of material possessed by important and old-established collections such as Calcutta University's Asutosh Museum, or the Gurusaday Museum on the outskirts of that city. There is, of course, no causal connection between the more comprehensive treatment accorded by specialists to a region's folk art, and the latter's true significance and value within the context of the whole. For this reason the superficial observer is all too

[10] From the English translation in COOMARASWAMY, A. K., *The Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon*, New York, 1964, pp. 33/34.



likely to be left with a distorted picture, the more so since writers of books of a general nature are only too prone to select their examples from amongst valuable early works of art in the above-named collections and to ignore material from other regions or less

famous collections, mention of which is made only in a few specialist publications. Within the scope available to us, it will not be possible wholly to eliminate these inconsistencies. However, the foregoing should at least warn the reader that a measure of



**31** Scene from the underworld.  
Saora pictograph in a wall painting, Orissa,  
height 145 cm.



caution is required in any quantitative or qualitative evaluation of folk art when considered within the context of the various regions.

In the light of what has been said above, Indian folk art should be regarded not only as an essential constituent of Indian art, but also, and more importantly, as a clue to the latter's history, and this in the first place because of its long and continuous traditions, in the second because of its wide dissemination throughout the Indian subcontinent and, last but not least, because of its identification with the people as a whole. In this connection mention might be made of the twin concepts of the Great and the Little

**32** Peacock. Kond carving  
executed on the door of a house. Tribal art, Orissa.

**33** Peacock. Detail of a post-Harappan  
painted pot from a burial ground in Harappa.



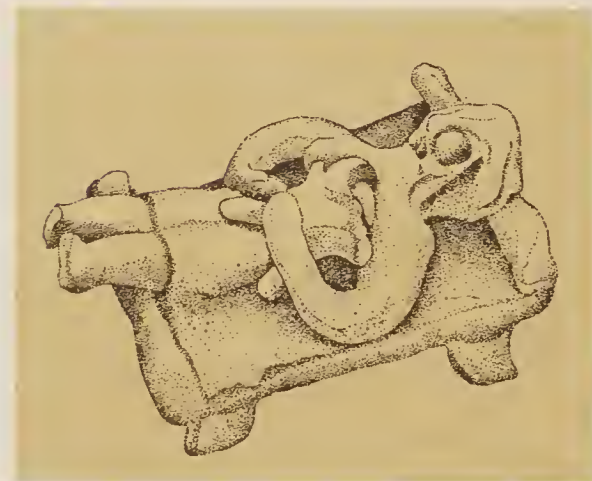


ture, painting and architecture already constitute what is today an historically ascertainable past. Yet we must beware of failing to see or of underestimating the fact that the achievements of Sanskrit culture have all of them entered the mainstream of Indian tradition, and to such good purpose that to many these might appear to constitute the sole cultural heritage of India. It is solely in order to combat so narrow and over-selective a view that the author of this book proposes to adopt a determined stand which, to many readers, may appear exaggerated.

A preoccupation with tradition and the historical past should be of service to the present and bring experience to bear upon the shaping of the future. With this task in mind, we must say something further about the significance to the present of Indian folk art. In the contemporary artistic scene in India, painting plainly predominates over

[11] Chicago School of Sociology, cf. LANNOY, R., *The Speaking Tree*, 1971. Reprint New York, 1975, p. 164. Contains a quotation from REDFIELD, R., *The Little Community*, Chicago, 1956. Recent American publications of this kind, stimulating though they may be, tend to convey the impression that, if we are to gain a proper understanding of the history of Indian civilization, we need do no more than consult the work of present-day American sociologists, the implication being that other specialist philological and archaeological studies by, say, Germans—or, for that matter, Indians—have now been rendered superfluous. On this subject see also: COOMARASWAMY, A. K., "The Nature of Folklore and Popular Art", in: *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society*, XXVII, 1936/1937. Here we would also draw attention to an important study by JAYAKAR, P., *The Earthen Drum*, Delhi (1981), which did not unfortunately become available until after this manuscript had been completed. Particularly worthy of note are the passages concerning the interpretation of folk art which P. JAYAKAR describes as ritual art. The ample illustrations might serve as a useful complement to this book.

sculpture and architecture, in other words over those arts which flourished during the heyday of Indian classicism. Today the main field of activity for painters and for the practitioners of the two-dimensional arts in general—though not all of these work in the Indian traditions—is the house, its furnishings, and the compartments into which it may be divided as, for instance, the individual living-room, the accommodation used by the family as a whole, or the communal dormitory occupied by a social group.<sup>12</sup>



Tradition advanced by the Chicago School of Sociology.<sup>11</sup>

Seen in the present context, popular culture represents the Great, or rather the Long Tradition in India. It has its beginnings in earliest pre-history, when the linguistic conventions characteristic of the Sanskrit language and literature could not yet have come into being. And it continues to survive today, long after the conscious, impermanent and limited classicism peculiar to Sanskrit culture had passed its zenith. Its magnificent creations in the fields of litera-

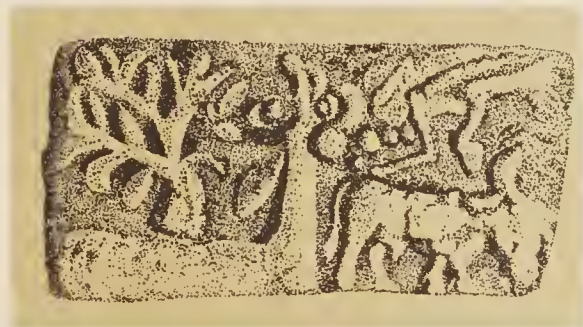
34 Solar symbol.  
Bhil tribal art. North-western India.

35 Pre-Harappan painted pottery motifs from the site of Kalibangan, Rajasthan.

36 Dove goddess.  
Terracotta figurine. Mohenjo Daro, Harappan culture.

37 Recumbent woman with child.  
Terracotta. Mohenjo Daro, Harappan culture.





Can any connection be established between the significance accorded to Indian folk art today and the emphasis placed in recent

[12] The impact of outside influences has made itself felt in all periods of the history of Indian civilization and Indian art, though never to so great an extent as now when increasing travel brings thousands of visitors from abroad. In the past, the popular culture of India has been able to absorb and assimilate such influences, in so far as they were compatible with the Indian character, without incurring any damage. In this book we have largely ignored those influences the impact of which is less apparent in folk art than in high culture. Cf. also: MODE, H., *Indische Frühkulturen*, Basel, 1944; MODE, H., *Das frühe Indien*, Stuttgart, 1959, Weimar, 1960, in which architecture could only be discussed peripherally. Virtually no earlier works on the subject are available, nor for that matter did a developed architecture exist until Indian civilization was in its heyday.

[13] HANDA, O. C., *Pahāri Folk Art*, Bombay, 1975, p. 61. The author lists a whole number of such plants.



years on the two-dimensional arts? Indications are not wanting, and some of these we now propose to summarize. Let us begin by considering techniques and materials. The two-dimensional arts have recourse to materials which, though subject to decay, are not only readily available but are to be found in their natural form almost everywhere in India. The raw materials for mat-making are universally to hand. Cotton is known to have been grown at a very early date consequent upon the development of agriculture. Silk yarns came somewhat later, while animal fibres were, of course, available long before either. Besides possessing the ability to extract a rich range of colours from plants, the Indians are also skilled in producing dyes and paints from minerals, clay sherds, and other materials. Suitable rock faces, flattened earth, leaves, egg-shells, bone and, last but not least, the living skin of human beings and animals (tattooing) had always served as foundations for painting or, where appropriate, as surfaces for incised and relief decoration as, later on, did house walls and the internal and external surfaces of simple pottery. All these materials were available to everyone no matter how poor the individual might be. Finally the formal content of the two-dimensional arts was not subject to any kind of restraint. On an even ground, decorative geometrical and vegetable forms can be multiplied and varied at will and lend them-

selves to the play of fancy. Again, simple figures, both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic, disposed haphazardly or otherwise at the top, the bottom or on either side of the composition, evidently formed part of the artist's immediate environment and, while evincing a degree of creative imagination, cannot have required more than a modicum of skill.

The circumstances governing architecture and sculpture were totally different. The technical processes involved in the procurement of materials and their preparation



38 Buffalo fight.  
Seal. Mohenjo Daro, Harappan culture.

39 Bull vaulting.  
Seal. Mohenjo Daro, Harappan culture.

40 Clay amulet decorated on both sides.  
Mohenjo Daro, Harappan culture.

41 Ayagapata depicting Jina. Jain ritual painting.  
Surround displays numerous symbols. Stone relief.  
Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, 1st century A.D.

42 Early historic Indian numismatic motifs,  
c. 550-350 B.C.



are more complex, being intimately bound up with social and economic prerequisites. The materials primarily associated with these technical skills, and contributing to their expansion and development, if not radical modification, were wood, bone, stone and clay for the modelling of hollow ware, the production of utensils and the creation of shelter for man and beast, of buildings, that is, the initial simplicity of which gave way to ever increasing complexity.

However, it was not until socio-economic developments had resulted in the emergence of a class society that urban high culture came into being and, with it, technical mastery not only in the working of stone and metals, but also in the firing of earthenware bricks and clay vessels. What was an increasingly complex technology entered the service of the ruling class and henceforward art concerned itself mainly with architecture and sculpture. The patron and client saw to the procurement of such materials as were not readily available. In the meantime, artistic activity outside the sphere of courts and temples, while it did not, of course, altogether cease, was for long something of a backwater. Little trace of it remains today and we are forced for the most part to rely on conjecture. Architecture in its developed form and sculpture executed in the most precious materials became status symbols for the ruling classes.<sup>14</sup> It was from these socially and economically dominant classes that the craftsmen received commissions for enduring sculptures and buildings.

There has long been a complete dearth of wealthy Indians who, eager to demonstrate their status by patronizing the arts, require monuments in stone and metal as lasting symbols of their power. Having lost much of the latter, and having been ousted by foreigners as early as the Islamic invasion, these classes finally ceased to be a deter-



43 Woman belabouring an importunate holy man.  
Bazaar painting. Kalighat, Bengal.



mining factor in the cultural field during the period of British rule. India can never really be said to have possessed an art-loving urban bourgeoisie.

What have survived are the Indian arts and crafts, the tradition of acquired skills, considerably sapped, however, by an increasing shortage of commissions, a situation which the authorities are now seeking to remedy. But official patronage, being also subject to socio-economic necessity, is, as a rule, less concerned with the artistic quality of an individual work as with mass-production.

The old artisan is on his way out and his place is being taken by the free-lance artist in what is a new and very recent phase in the history of Indian art. Many of these earliest free-lance artists, notably the painters of the so-called Bengali School, have taken as their model the traditional Indian forms of the two-dimensional arts as found, for instance, in the Ajanta paintings or the magnificent works produced by the schools of the Indian miniaturists. But the influence of such handicrafts as still survive today may be seen in the work of those artists who are aware of their debt to the Indian tradition and whose models are not drawn solely from European and American art.<sup>15</sup>

The notable revival of painting, the decoration and furnishing by Indian artists of living and communal quarters, enables us today to place not only the amateur works of the Indian housewife, but also the rock paintings of prehistoric hunters and food gatherers within the context, both historical and territorial, of Indian art, and of Indian folk art in particular. Moreover, Indian free-lance artists have long since ceased to cater exclusively for the needs of foreigners, of tourists ever on the look-out for souvenirs. The number of Indians producing works of art



[14] HARMON, M., in *Encyclopedia of World Art*, V. *Folk Art*, New York, 1961, p. 466.

44 Beauty at her toilet.  
Bazaar painting. Kalighat, Bengal.



has increased in proportion to the number of those seeking their products. This marks the beginning of a development in contemporary Indian art which, over a wider spectrum and at a more advanced socio-economic level, will enable it to become, as it once was in primitive society, genuine folk art serving everyone, but now fully conscious of the changes taking place in the world and of the influence exerted by those changes upon the art of other nations.

Thus Indian art, including the general corpus of popular tradition (both ascertained and notional) and over and above the great classical works long familiar to art lovers, emerges as something that is at once old and new, that is rooted in tradition and yet forward-looking. Regarded as a whole, Indian art is a valuable witness to artistic talent during the major phases of man's cultural development, but it is no less a particular and, in its own way unmistakable, monument to all earlier achievements, a rich source of creative power, an indispensable contribution on the part of India to the culture of mankind.

[15] A courageous and most important paper on Indian women's art, cf. SCHMIDT-MOSER, E., "Die Frau als Künstlerin in der traditionellen Indischen Gesellschaft", in: *Indo-Asia*, 21. 2. 1979, pp. 175-187. The author lists four status categories. 1. Court art and craftwork, produced for the secular and ecclesiastical aristocracy, in other words the social élite. 2. Urban bazaar art and craftwork, produced for the urban middle classes, in particular business men and the wealthy élite. 3. Village art and craftwork governed by a traditional system of reciprocal services, known in India as the jajmani system. 4. Peripatetic artists and craftsmen without fixed abode and not bound to any one body of customers. Women artists are wholly unrepresented in this "descending scale of prestige". Also: HARMON, M., in: *Encyclopedia of World Art*, V, *Folk Art*, New York, 1961, p. 467: "Rajput painting drew heavily on folklore". HANDA, O. C., *Pahari Folk Art*, Bombay, 1975, p. 57.



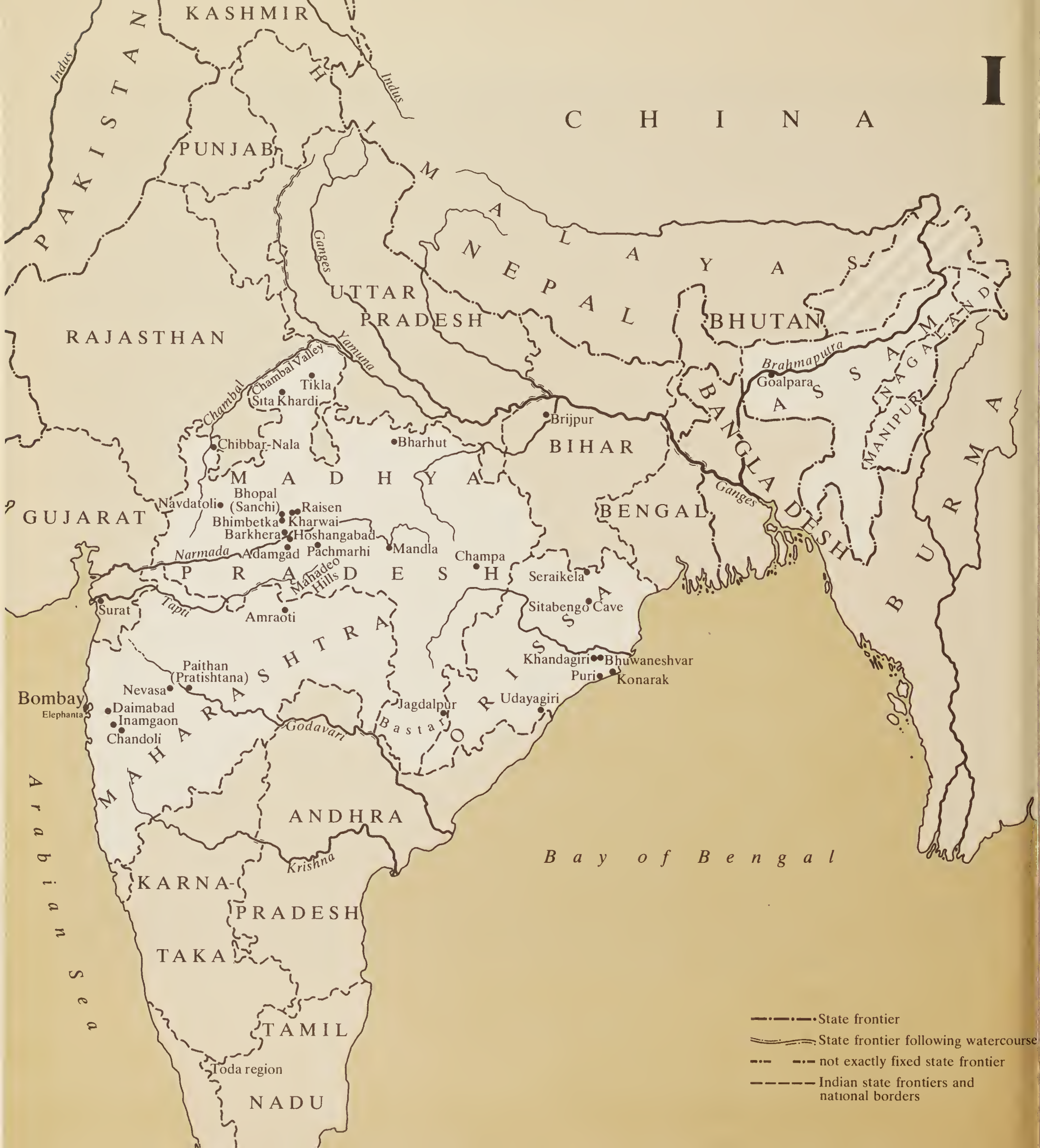
45 Footprint with symbols:  
Fish, screen, shell, diagram, banner, vase, lotus,  
wheel, etc. Page from a contemporary calendar.





46 Warrior mounted on a tiger.  
Contemporary playing-card. Maharashtra.





C H I N A

PUNJAB

RAJASTHAN

UTTAR  
PRADESH

BHUTAN

BIHAR

BENGAL

GUJARAT

M A D H Y A

P R A D E S H

ANDHRA

KARNA-  
PRADESH

TAKA

TAMIL

NADU

- State frontier
- State frontier following watercourse
- not exactly fixed state frontier
- Indian state frontiers and national borders



# Central India

In this chapter we shall consider the beginnings of Indian art, or rather of Indian folk art in the broadest sense of the term. The territory selected for this purpose comprises the present states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Assam, along with the smaller states in the north-east corner of India. Every period of Indian artistic creativity is represented in this central and north-eastern zone and it is here, too, that the oldest tribal territories are concentrated along with the richest store of early rock paintings. Maharashtra and Orissa in particular may also be regarded as notable exponents of contemporary Indian folk art. At the same time each of the above-mentioned states has a great deal in common with its neighbours: Maharashtra with Gujarat and Karnataka; Madhya Pradesh with Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh; Orissa with Bihar and Bengal, but also with Andhra Pradesh; Assam with Bengal; the north-

eastern tribal territories with the adjoining areas beyond the Indian frontier.

All these facts must be taken into account, and all of it exerted a greater or lesser degree of influence on every period of artistic development within the region under discussion. Not till we turn our attention to Madhya Pradesh, the real heartland of that region, however, do we realize fully the extent to which, geographically and historically, this forms a key area and one that is of considerable relevance to the development of Indian art as whole.<sup>16</sup> We are aware that such a statement may be received with some degree of scepticism. For the founding of Indian civilization has long been ascribed to the Vedic Aryas alone, although latterly an increasing body of opinion has come to believe that they were preceded in the Indus Valley by the earlier Harappan culture, which is not to say that the latter has by any means been accorded its rightful place in the history of Indian civilization as a whole. Can it really be our intention, then, to proceed beyond this cautiously adopted view? To include in the history of Indian civilization those “wild” tribes whose descendants, the Adivasis, today rank lower than the lowest caste in the social order and are, in fact, looked upon more as animals, as natural creatures outside of the human community and without pretensions to culture? However worthy of note these Adivasis may be in the eyes of anthropologists and ethnologists, they cannot

# Early Art in Hill and Jungle

but figure in the social theory of orthodox Brahmans as mere chattels of no cultural relevance.

Not until very recently has the investigation of Indian rock painting come to be regarded as a serious discipline. Many of the early accounts are far from accurate and poorly illustrated. Accordingly there has been a tendency to greet any discussion of a more comprehensive nature with the utmost scepticism.<sup>17</sup> Thanks to a number of more recent publications we have some fairly reliable material to serve as a basis for our reflections. One of the earliest groups of pictures, painted on the smooth walls of rock shelters, is devoted in its initial phase exclusively to representations on a vast scale of such animals as the elephant and the wild ox. Before long, however, these creatures were joined by human figures, for the most part depicted in the form of simple line drawings and, by virtue of their association with the animals, probably intended to represent hunters. The earlier phases are distinguished by drawings casually outlined in subdued reddish brown paint. Later on, a white border appears. The inner surfaces, initially left blank, were subsequently filled with abstract combinations of geometrical lines.

Our brief survey necessarily precludes a discussion of the minutiae of rock art, its techniques, the states of its development and the different groups of finds. Rather, we must address ourselves to the as yet un-

[16] MAURY, C., *Folk Origins of Indian Art*, New York/London, 1969. The author places considerable emphasis on the importance of Madhya Pradesh. Cf. also BHATTACHARYA, P. K., *Historical Geography of Madhya Pradesh from Early Records*, Delhi, 1977.

[17] On rock paintings see WAKANKAR, V. S., and BROOKS, R. R., *Stone Age painting in India*, Bombay, 1976; WANKE, L., *Zentralindische Felsbilder*, Graz, 1977; GORDON, D. H., *The Pre-historic Background of Indian Culture*, Bombay, 1958 (of which the dating has largely been superseded).







substantiated thesis here advanced and consider, with special reference to their fundamental position, India's prehistoric rock paintings which are now regarded, both quantitatively and qualitatively, as works of major importance. Are there any indications that elements of rock painting and rock engraving continued to survive in the art, or rather the folk art, of later periods? First of all we should lay stress on our basic contention that the social, religio-magical message of early rock painting points to a date anterior to all other Indian art, a contention founded on the knowledge that, long before the appearance of farming or early urban communities, the Indian sub-continent was inhabited by hunters and food gatherers. This in turn is confirmed by a whole range of archaeological discoveries. A recent examination of early remains in the immediate vicinity of the cave paintings has provided further proof of the fact that hunters and food gatherers were the earliest people known to have existed on Indian soil. Moreover, their presence is attested not only by stone tools and other implements but also, after a given date, by rock paintings and rock engravings. At the same time each picture is a valuable document on the earliest manifestations of Indian art. The country contains hundreds of such sites and thousands of individual paintings. Provisional statistics show that the vast majority is to be found in Madhya Pradesh, the region central to our inquiry.<sup>18</sup> Depicted here are the animals of the virgin jungle as well as men with their primitive hunting implements, their stones, axes, throwing-sticks, clubs, harpoons and bows and arrows. Increasingly we find pictures of direct confrontations between men and wild

beasts, that is to say, hunting scenes, as well as early allusions to religio-magic practices, in the shape of dancers adorned with horns, feathers or masks, men engaged in combat with animals, vaulting over them or offering them up as sacrifices. The question of the continuity of these pictures with later Indian art is difficult to resolve solely on the strength of the subject matter described above. Changes in a society's mode of existence also brought about changes in the content and import of the pictures. Virtually all we have for purposes of comparison are a few means of expression, determined by the form of representation, the artistic characteristics of which recur at a later date though adapted to changes of subject matter. Nor are there many instances of the survival of specific manners, customs and conventions. If we examine the early rock paintings with a view to discovering details of this nature, what strikes us first is the predominance of certain animals, the Indian elephant, for example, which to this day has remained the favourite subject of the Indian artist. Also in evidence is a predilection for one species of bird, the peacock. In the case of other typically Indian animal motifs, continuity tends to be limited. The buffalo and tiger, for instance, so much favoured by the early rock painters, begin, in course of time, to lose their popularity, while the Indian rhinoceros suffers almost total eclipse. For purposes of comparison, the earliest rock paintings are of little use if the composition be viewed as a whole, since the individual figures would appear for the most part to have been arbitrarily scattered over the surface of the picture. On closer investigation, however, individual groups become apparent within this seemingly chaotic jumble and some are not without interest from the point of view of later artistic development. Here we might cite two that are

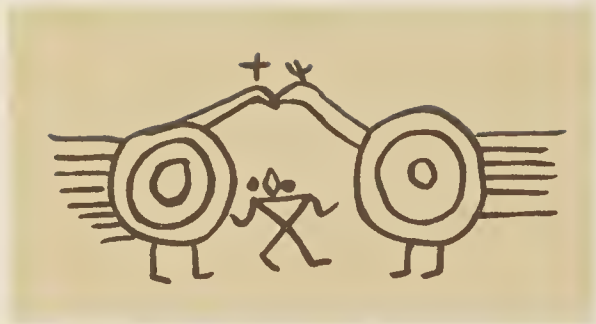


[18] For statistics of sites, see WAKANKAR, V. S., and BROOKS, R. R., *Stone Age Painting in India*, Bombay, 1976, pp. 93-95.

47 Sequence of cave painting styles, Bhimbetka. After V.M. Misra. Prehistoric; transitional phase, historic.

48 Representations of men and animals in cave paintings, arranged in chronological order (after L. Wanke). Prehistoric and historic periods.





of particular note—the hunting scene in which a wild animal is shown surrounded by men, and the bull-vaulting scene in which one or more people clear the creature's back in a single leap and sometimes engage it in combat. Both reflect a specific content, namely the chase and ritual, as do the rows of figures, presumably dancers, frequently found in these pictures. Here again the performers are irregularly disposed, though they are distinguished by the violence of their movements. Many of them wear animal masks, feathers and, on their backs, a tail-like adornment. A horned human figure constantly recurs. All these themes are met with again in later Indian art. One group, which is of more than formal interest, consists of two distinct figures disposed in a cruciform pattern. A scene of this kind from Bhimbetka has been interpreted as a medicine-man attending an injured patient. Also found in rock painting is the so-called animal tamer theme in which a human figure is flanked by affronted animals, most frequently birds. Between these there may sometimes be an object resembling a vessel. One painting shows a bird carrying a human figure head downward in its beak, a curious rendering not unreminiscent of the stork, the bringer of children. A compound creature with two heads and two sets of front legs has already been identified, as has another with three heads. Evidence of activities other than hunting, such as tree-climbing and the collection of honey, is also provided by these paintings.

49 Peacocks symmetrically disposed.  
Cave painting. Kharwai, Raisen, Madhya Pradesh.



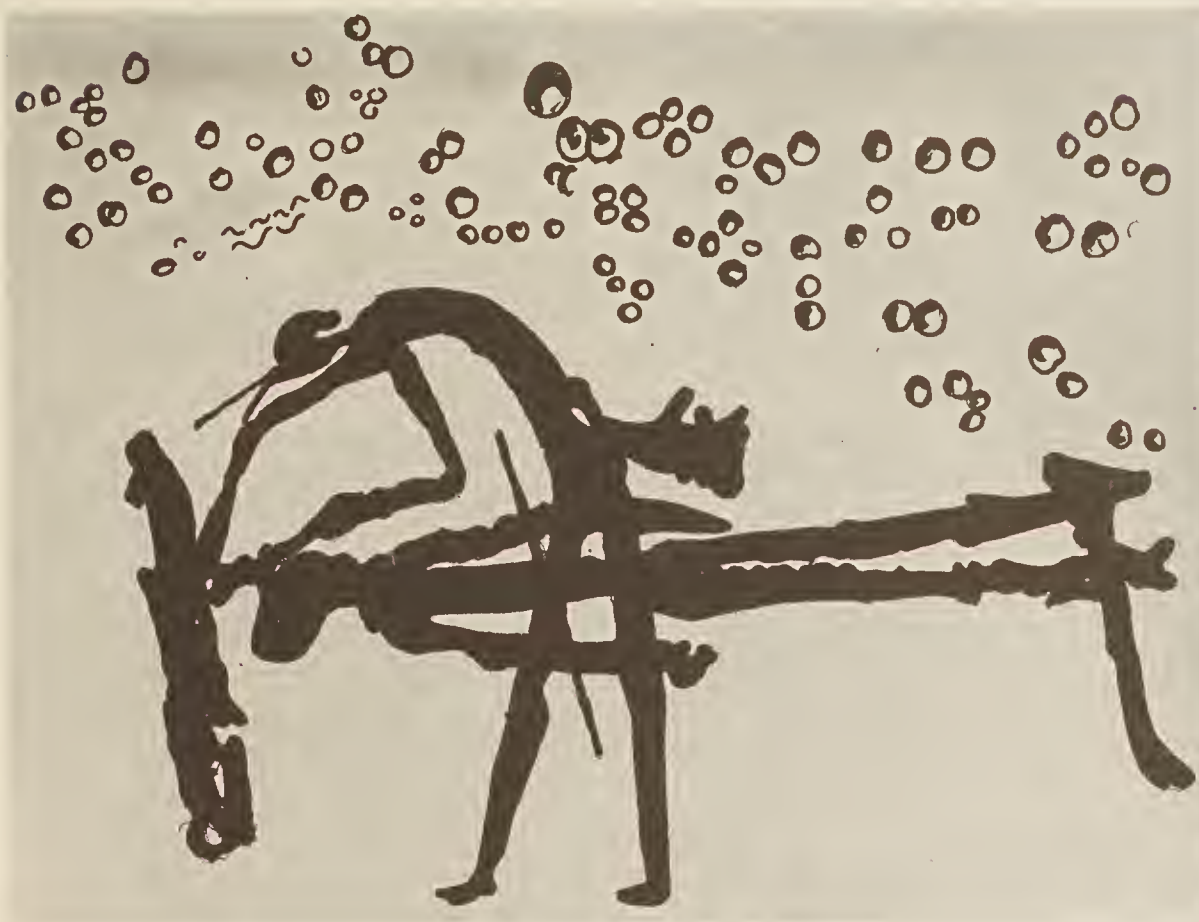
Interesting, too, are the numerous so-called X-ray pictures in which, within the outline of one animal, we may discern the figure of another (denoting pregnancy?) or, more commonly, line drawings of triangles and other geometrical motifs. Such motifs recur in the later phases of rock art, the most interesting pattern of all being a cellular design possibly corresponding to a honeycomb. Other repeat designs, consisting of swastikas and rows of I-shaped motifs, cannot unfortunately be dated with any accuracy. We may assume that they belong to the later phase of primitive rock art, as do some isolated renderings of the swastika, the extremities of which are occasionally given animal's heads. Simple crosses,

50 Peacock and mounted figure.  
Cave painting. Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh.

on the other hand, some of them with a quatrefoil surround, as well as circles filled, for example, with an eight-pointed star, should probably be assigned to a rather earlier date. A very fine double labyrinth would be of the utmost interest if it could be accurately dated. Other patterns worthy of note are opposed triangles as well as a comb-like motif, both designs being much favoured in the decoration of pots. Rectangles disposed one inside the other after the manner of Chinese boxes and sexual symbols such as the *yoni* triangle point to magico-apatropaic and sexual concepts of propagation and fecundity.

As yet no clearly recognizable symbols for mountains or water have come to light,





while representations of plants occur only very rarely in the early stylistic phases of rock art. Although the cart, a conveyance drawn by buffaloes or oxen, was still a stranger to the world of the earliest hunters and food gatherers, illustrations of that vehicle would appear to go back as far as the later phases of prehistory. Horse and rider occur later still, belonging as they do to the

period of a developed class society. A more accurate dating would, of course, be of considerable importance but, in the present state of our knowledge, views differ widely on this particular point.

To sum up it should be remarked that many of the motifs, scenes and symbols enumerated above will be met with again, our intention at this juncture being simply to draw

the reader's attention to the primitive documents which have come to light amidst the hills and forests at the very heart of India.

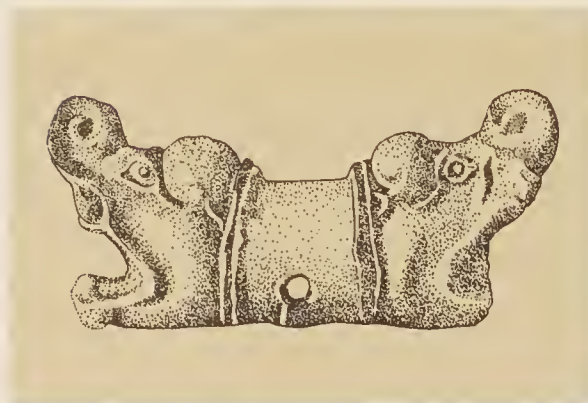
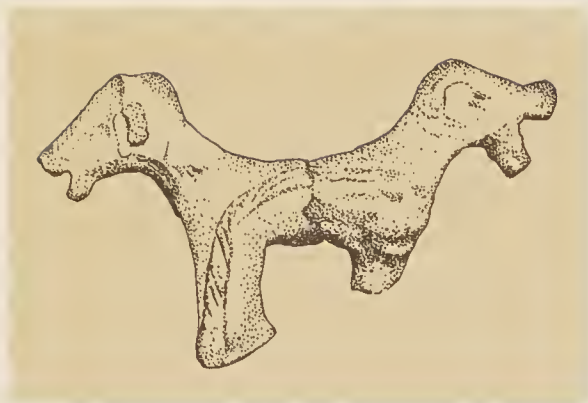
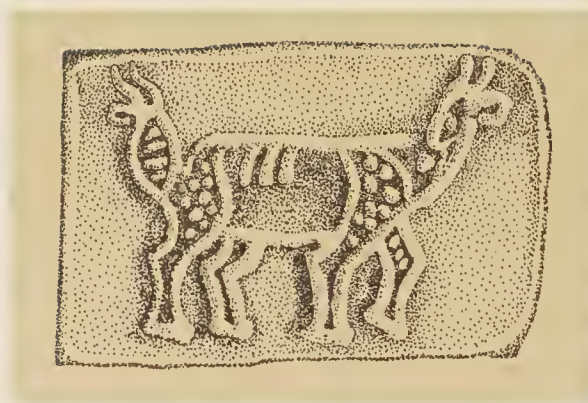
Another important centre in the history of early Indian art is situated in this same central belt, though further to the west, in Maharashtra and the adjacent territory of western Madhya Pradesh. It is not, however, confined to this geographical area alone, for it extends northwards, in particular to Gujarat, Rajasthan and beyond as well as to the territories immediately to the south, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The region seems to be the birthplace of the first village settlements on Indian soil and hence also of the art created by the early

**51** Animal tamer flanked by two beasts.  
Cave paintings. Pachmarhi, Madhya Pradesh.

**52** Medicine man attending a wounded patient.  
Mesolithic rock painting. Bhimbetka,  
Madhya Pradesh.

**53** Circle of bulls' heads.  
Rock painting. Chambal Valley, central India.





executed in many Indian villages, among tribal communities such as the Warlis of Maharashtra and the Saoras of Orissa as well as in the houses of the Hindu castes in Bihar, in Saurashtra (Gujarat), Haryana, the Pahari tracts (Himachal Pradesh) and also in the south. In the great majority of cases the work is carried out by women on special occasions such as feast days and family celebrations.

In addition to painting, we must now consider the plastic arts, namely baked terracotta figures of men and animals and, more rarely, small metal sculptures the appearance of which indicates a transition to a further stage of development and to the use of more advanced techniques in the urban and rural sphere. No wood carvings survive though at one time these must certainly have existed and, since they must now be regarded as irretrievably lost, their discus-

peasant communities. It is an art that springs from a different socio-economic stage of development and one we must assign to a later date, both in relative and in absolute terms, than that of the hunters and food gatherers discussed at the beginning of the chapter. However such of the products of this village art as have come down to us likewise consist for the most part in paintings, though in this case applied to the walls of vessels. Here we may find an all but inexhaustible repertory of figurative and abstract geometrical decoration.<sup>19</sup> Excavations have shown that, although houses still existed in the villages, none was sufficiently well preserved to provide us with any clues as to the decoration of the walls. It may, however, be assumed that pictures and ornamentation characteristic of this early rural population also found expression in the painting of their homes, a source of information on Indian art that is now lost to us. Yet such paintings are still



54 Two-headed animal (bullock?).  
Rock painting. Chibbar-Nala, central India.

55 Two-headed animal.  
Terracotta. Nilgiri, Tamil Nadu.

56 Two-headed animal.  
Small copper plaque. Mohenjo Daro. Harappan culture.

57 Two-headed animal. Terracotta.  
Nevasa, Maharashtra, 2nd-1st-century B.C.

58 Pregnant animal (?).  
Rock painting. Raisen, Madhya Pradesh.

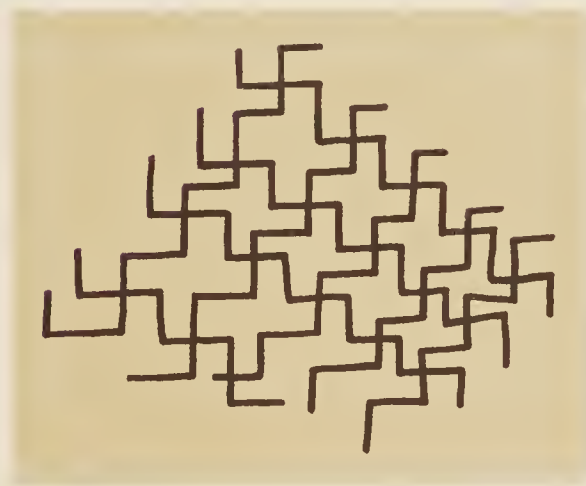


sion in the present context must perforce be purely hypothetical.

Just as the time span in which the earliest rock paintings came into being extended over several millennia, so the development of this early peasant art may be assumed to have continued for a period of two or three thousand years. That development saw the birth of a considerable number of so-called local cultures, of which several are comprised in the territory we are about to discuss. Of these we would cite the Malwa and Jorwe cultures each, in accordance with archaeological custom, being distinguished from the other primarily by the specific forms and techniques employed in its pottery. They derive their names from the earliest or the most important sites. The painted pots follow the tradition of rock painting, the emphasis being on zoomorphic figures and the special use of cross-hatching and other geometrical motifs to fill in the outline of the bodies. Only a few years ago an important discovery was made at Daimabad<sup>20</sup> of a group of four bronzes. These, like the animals on the pots, betray certain analogies with what are probably contemporaneous rock paintings, while at the same time they recall the early hunter's predilection for specific types of big game. The subjects, rendered with consummate skill, consist of an elephant, a buffalo, a rhinoceros, and a team of zebus harnessed to a chariot driven by a charioteer. All four pieces either are, or were at one time,

[19] On pots painted by village artists see the comprehensive study by SANKALIA, H. D., *Pre-historic Art in India*, Delhi, 1978.

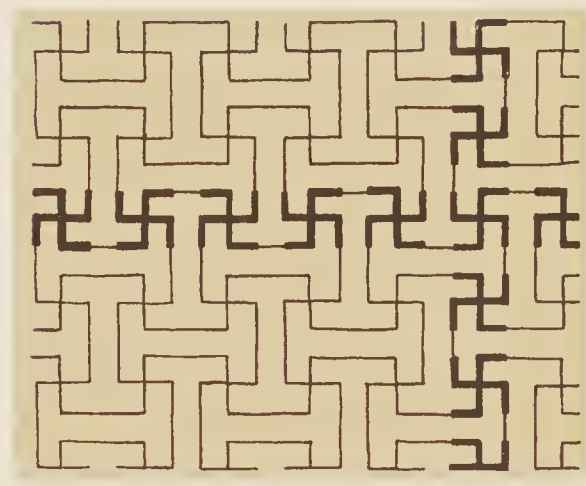
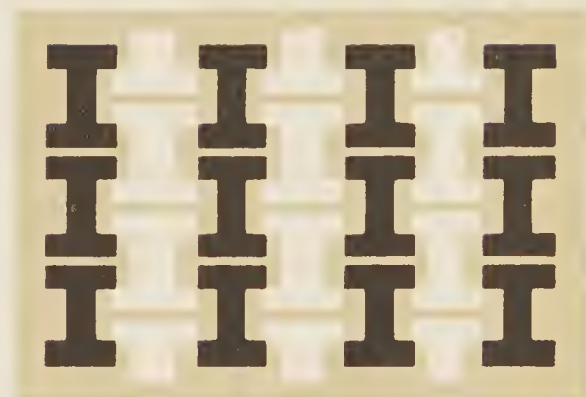
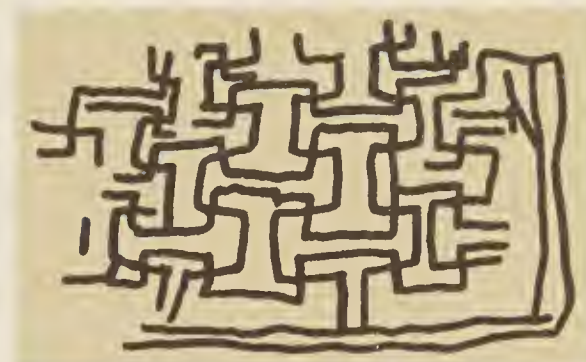
[20] An account of the discoveries at Daimabad first appeared in: *Dawn of Civilization in Maharashtra*, Bombay, 1975 (Catalogue), and a more detailed paper on the same subject by DHAVALIKAR, M. K., "Proto-Paśupati in Western India", in: *East and West*, NS28, Dec. 1978, pp. 203–211.



mounted on wheels. This find has been assigned to the second millennium, or more precisely to about 1300 B.C. The group may be regarded as a kind of link between the initial phase (as represented by the big game of the earliest rock paintings and certain motifs of the Harappan culture) and the later phase. For wheeled zoomorphic figures have always found favour with Indian artists and still feature prominently in the folk art of today.

**59** All-over swastika design.  
Rock painting. Chibbar-Nala, central India,  
height 106 cm.

**60** Schematic representation of the same  
swastika motif.



A final group of small sculptures, which undoubtedly goes back to pre-historic times, consists of terracotta figurines of men and animals produced by village potters some time after the fourth millennium B.C. The earliest examples originated in the north-west zone, while works dating from about the second millennium B.C. have also been identified in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. At this point mention should also be made of a number of important sites be-

**61** Over-all design based on I-shape.  
Rock painting. Sita Khardi, Madhya Pradesh.

**62** Regular use of I-shape in over-all design.

**63** Accentuation of the swastika motif in  
the above design.





lieved to exist further to the south in the Nilgiri Hills<sup>21</sup> where a large number of clay figurines has already been found, some of which have made their way to European museums. The majority of these figurines, sometimes associated with the Toda tribe, take the form of funerary offerings. Since they have already been widely discussed in specialist publications, there is no need to describe them in detail here. It should, however, be pointed out that there can be no question of these south Indian terracottas antedating those of the Harappan cul-

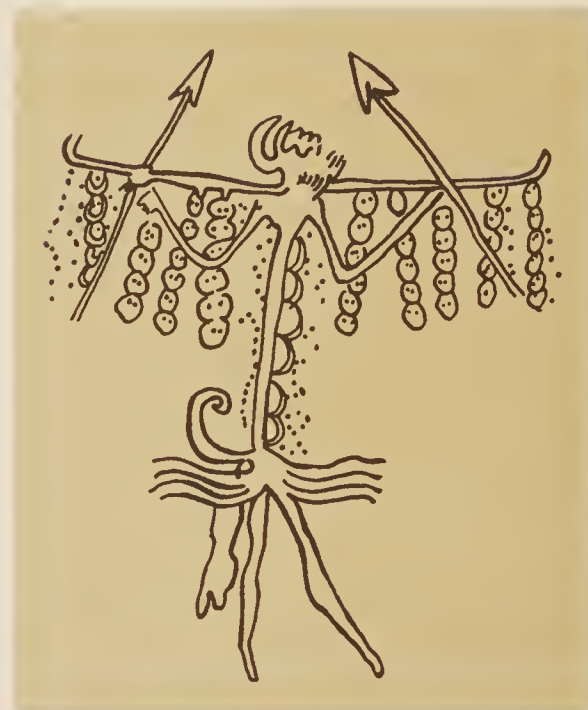
ture<sup>22</sup>, for they can hardly be earlier than the end of the first millennium B.C. On the other hand, some of the terracottas recently discovered in Maharashtra and Madhya

[21] On Nilgiri terracottas, see DAS GUPTA, C. C., *Origin and Evolution of Indian Clay Sculpture*, Calcutta, 1961, pp. 1-23.

[22] DAS GUPTA, C. C., *Origin and Evolution of Indian Clay Sculpture*, Calcutta, 1961, p. 23.

[23] Female figurine from Inamgaon: *Dawn of Civilization in Maharashtra*, Bombay, 1975, Plate 9 (Catalogue).

Pradesh would appear to go back as far as the second millennium B.C. and may be regarded as coeval with the late Harappan period. Of especial interest is a naked female figure, at one time evidently standing on a bull's back, which has been discov-



64 Animals, yoni triangle, hand, hunter.  
Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh.

65 Dancing warrior.  
Rock painting. Pachmarhi, Madhya Pradesh.

66 Demonic animal.  
Rock painting. Pachmarhi, Madhya Pradesh.





ered at Inamgaon in Poona district in Maharashtra.<sup>23</sup> Although severely damaged, both figures evince a degree of realism and suggest the worship of a female deity which may be broadly subsumed under the general term “mother goddess cult”. As we shall presently see, such cults were typical of early peasant cultures and preceded the religions which grew up in the towns of the Harappan culture. The worship of mother goddesses was to persist in India and, as has been rightly observed, the mainstream of Hindu culture has been constantly fed by local cults arising out of these early peasant religious concepts. In many rural parts of India the *gramadevata* or village deities are still worshipped today, although their connection with Brahmanic-Hindu ideas is tenuous in the extreme.

Besides this important group, many other isolated figurines of similar mother goddesses have been found in the area under discussion, all of them belonging to the second half of the second millennium and the first half of the first millennium B.C.

We shall now turn to the rich store of folk art which, rather than deriving from archaeological excavations and prehistorical times, is chronologically classifiable as belonging in its entirety to the present day, although its traditions may or may not be of relatively early date. In the case of these nineteenth and twentieth century works—earlier pieces occur very rarely—it is impossible to say with any certainty exactly when the first link in the long chain of tradition was established. On the other hand, many of the pieces available to us clearly



67 Group of dancers.  
Rock painting, Brijpur, Madhya Pradesh.

68 Groups of dancers.  
Painted pot, Navdatoli, Madhya Pradesh, 2nd half  
of the 2nd millennium B.C.

69 Ritual dance.  
The right-hand dancer is probably wearing a  
bison-horn mask, and the dancer next to him a plumed  
head-dress. Mesolithic rock painting. Bhimbetka,  
Madhya Pradesh.



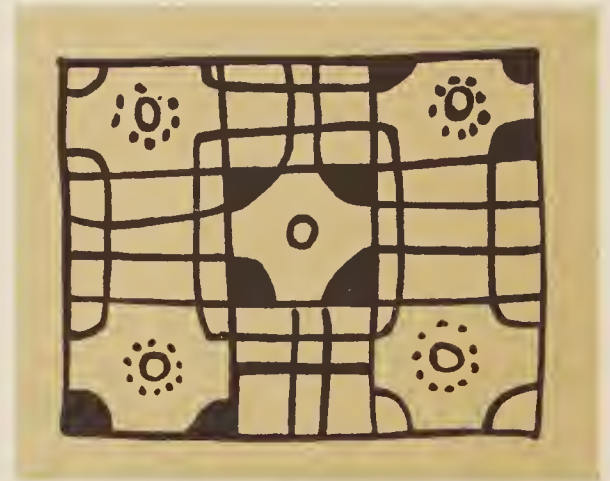
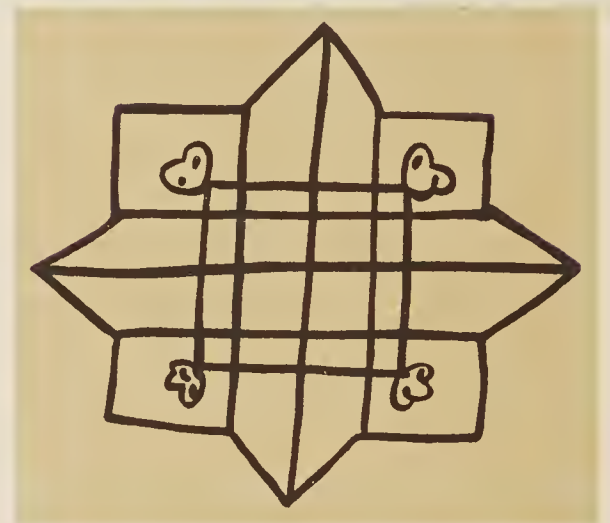


betray more recent influences, notably those of chronologically ascertainable local developments linked with the high religions, the courts and the towns. If we are to span these long periods of three thousand years or so and obtain some indication as to the influences to which folk art may have been subject, we must first take a brief look at the most important events that occurred in more recent and better documented times in this region.

The urban civilization of the Late Vedic and early Buddhist period would appear to have entered the central regions of India from the north. The Harappan culture, the extent of whose influence on central and southern India is still somewhat obscure, was superseded some time between 1000 and 500 B.C., first by the Brahmanic and then by the Buddhist and Jain high cultures, a sequence known to us primarily from the Late Vedic and epic writings as well as from archaeological discoveries. As a result of this north-south movement there came into being in the western part of the subcontinent a number of cave temples and rock monasteries and, in the eastern region, the world-famous stupas of Bharhut and Sanchi and the Jain cave temples at Udayagiri and Khandagiri. Monks chose to settle in these remote inland areas, well away from the



real centres of political power, yet at no great distance from the old trade routes which led from the great northern river valleys to the east and west coasts. Throughout the Maurya, Shunga, and Shatavahana dynasties and until well into the Gupta period, this state of affairs changed little if at all. With the fall of the Gupta dynasty, some of the neighbouring territories acquired a certain degree of political importance. The powerful Gangetic states decayed, while Hinduism consolidated its foothold in the more southerly parts of the subcontinent. True, the Pallava dynasty in the east and the Chalukya and Rastrakuta dynasties in the west possessed political centres south of the central zone, although these did not remain uninterruptedly within their sphere of influence. Some of the most



impressive creations of the Indian early Middle Ages are to be found in the Hindu cave temples at Ellora and in the rock shrine dedicated to Shiva on Elephanta Island

70 Geometrical motifs.

Painted pottery. Navdatoli, Madhya Pradesh, 2nd half of the 2nd millennium B.C.

71 Tree motifs in rock paintings.

Kharwai and Parkhera. Raisen, Madhya Pradesh.

72/73 Symbols in rock paintings.

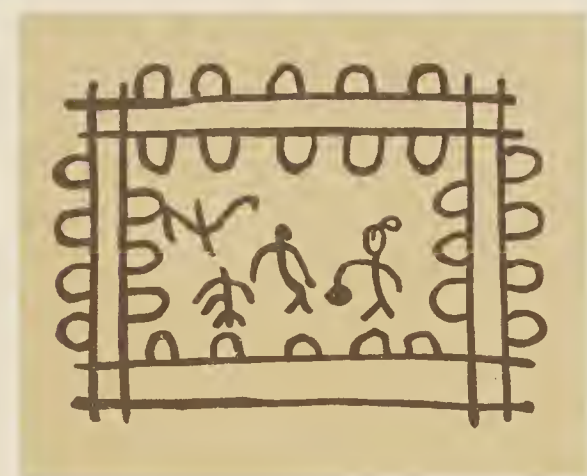
Chambal Valley, central India.



near Bombay. Later there arose states, such as the Candela Kingdom in central India which, though relatively small, were concerned with the furtherance of art and culture in the service of self-aggrandizement. To this period belong the great Hindu temple complexes, richly embellished with relief and sculptural decoration, such as those at Khajuraho and Bhuwaneshvar.

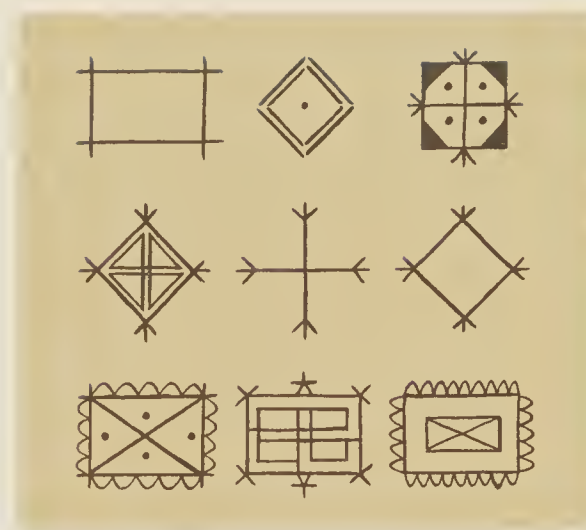
Foreign impulses would seem to have reached central India comparatively early. In the village cultures of the second millennium B.C. we may discern Iranian influence at work in, say, the long-spouted vessels of the Jorwe culture. The western dominions of the Kshatrpa and Shatavahana dynasties would appear to have been subject to the influence of Hellenistic culture, while at a somewhat later date there is evidence of trading relations between Rome and India's western littoral. The Islamic conquest also began to make itself felt in central India, and, where previously in the north and south powerful Hindu states existed, Islamic rulers now held sway in their territories. From about 1500 onwards, European influence grew, initially in coastal areas and more notably in Maharashtra. Subsequently the hill country of central India again became the seat of a powerful Indian protest movement against foreign rule. With his Mahratta army, Shivaji made deep inroads northwards and eastwards. As the heartland of central India, however, Madhya Pradesh was always to remain detached from the most important centres of political power. Even the British chose to establish their seats of government in Madras, Calcutta, Delhi and Bombay, the most important strategic points in the north, south, east and west, thereby circumventing the central regions.

[24] MAURY, C., *Folk Origins of Indian Art*, New York/London, 1969.



It has long since been observed that, during the two thousand years or so in which Indian high art evolved and attained its apogee, central India continued to go its own way. For instance the sculptural decoration adorning the Buddhist buildings at Sanchi and Bharhut undoubtedly betrays certain features of popular art as well as a considerable affinity with the much older Yaksha and Naga temples dedicated to local nature deities. In his book *Folk Origins of Indian Art*, C. Maury has drawn attention to similar traditions relating to the later Hindu temples of central India.<sup>24</sup>

It was here that obscure Hindu cults erected shrines with strongly marked local characteristics. But even such famous edifices as, say, the Jagannath Temple at Puri in Orissa



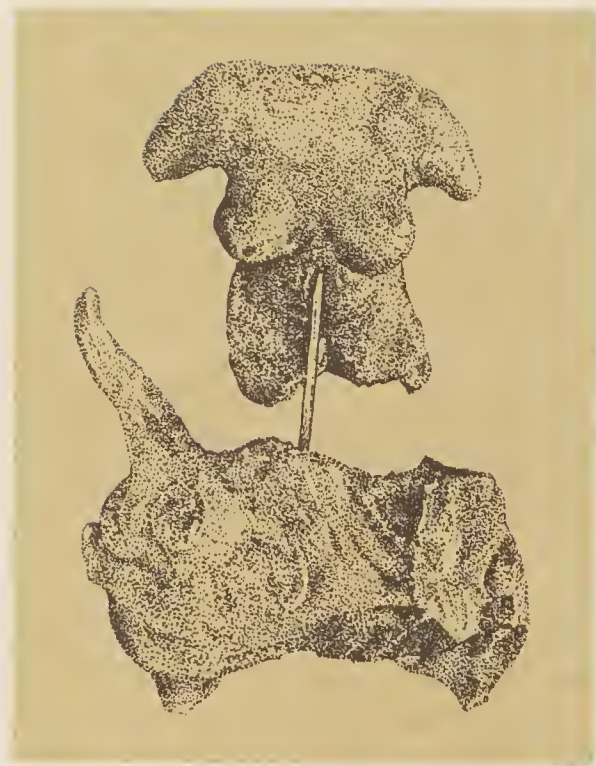
give evidence of originality, not only in the remarkable treatment of the images of the presiding deities, but also in the failure of certain features to conform to the canons of strict Brahmanic orthodoxy.

We have already stressed more than once the special character of India's central zone not only as a most important halting place for India's autochthonous tribal population, but also as a region in which they might take refuge or settle. In this context we should also mention the adjoining territories to the north-east, in particular South Bihar and parts of Bengal, as well as those areas in Gujarat and Rajasthan inhabited by the remnants of tribes belonging to the widely dispersed Bhil groups. Similarly, the extreme north-east of India harbours a more distinct tribal group which may be described as Naga in the widest sense of the term. And whereas the Hindu art of Assam and the border country is related to that of Bengal, the tribal art of the Nagas must be seen as independent and self-sufficient. The general characteristics of Indian tribal art have led us to include Assam and the north-eastern border areas in the above-mentioned central zone, even at the cost of some inconsistency, since the area concerned might equally well be regarded as a zone in its own right. The Nagas are ethnically distinct from

74/75 Chauks (rectangles). Rock paintings. Kharwai, Raisen, Madhya Pradesh.

76 Tattoo mark in the form of chauks.





the central Indian tribes and their tribal kinsmen live outside the frontiers of India. Very little research has unfortunately been devoted to the art of India's still extant tribal population and it is becoming ever more difficult to collect and describe such little material as is available. Verrier Elwin, probably the greatest authority on the subject, has published two monographs on the tribal art of central India and the North-East Frontier.<sup>25</sup> He, too, laments the virtual absence of anything that might throw light on the aesthetic sensibility of this section of the Indian population. These people have for too long been socially and culturally oppressed by their Hindu neighbours. Whole areas of artistic activity have been denied them. For instance the production of all earthenware goods and, of course, of metal work is monopolized by the Hindu castes in the neighbouring villages. Recent attempts at resuscitation have failed to achieve any noteworthy results, for traditions once lost cannot easily be revived, the more so since the process of social integra-

tion with the lowest castes of Hindu society continues inexorably. In his relatively extensive collections Elwin has succeeded in bringing together wood carvings and, to a lesser degree, masks and funerary pillars. Furthermore, he has been able to save from total destruction valuable documents on the domestic wall painting practised by sedentary groups such as the Saoras in Orissa. We shall begin by considering the paintings which we propose to place in the general context of village folk art. Here we should distinguish three main groups. First the domestic paintings which may be seen in some sort as the successors to the prehistoric cave paintings and to archaic village art, and which serve to adorn the home, being applied to the walls or to levelled ground outside the houses. The subjects relate to domestic events, to particular festivities in the cycle of family life and to the feast days of the domestic tutelary deities. The affinity to rock paintings lies in the immediate relationship between the picture on the one hand and the home or shrine of the author

or the beholder of that picture on the other. What we have here is non-professional art of a communal kind and intended, by a species of pictorial magic, to avert evil from the community and ensure the latter's prosperity. In the territory under discussion these domestic paintings are known to us from the pictographic compositions of the

[25] ELWIN, V., *The Tribal Art of Middle India*, London, 1961; ELWIN, V., *The Art of the North-East Frontier of India*, Shillong, 1959.



77 Female torso and bull.  
Terracottas from the village of Inamgaon,  
Maharashtra, c. 1300 B.C.

78 Zoomorphic vessel.  
Nuzi, northern Mesopotamia, 2nd millennium B.C.  
(reconstruction).

79 Zoomorphic vessel.  
Navdatoli, Madhya Pradesh, c. 12th century B.C.

80 House, sunflowers, men, tigers, peacocks, birds  
and trees. Wall painting in a Kol house, Bihar.

81 Dancers. Gond wall painting.  
Patangarh, Mandla, Madhya Pradesh.





82 Country dance.  
Warli painting on paper. Maharashtra.





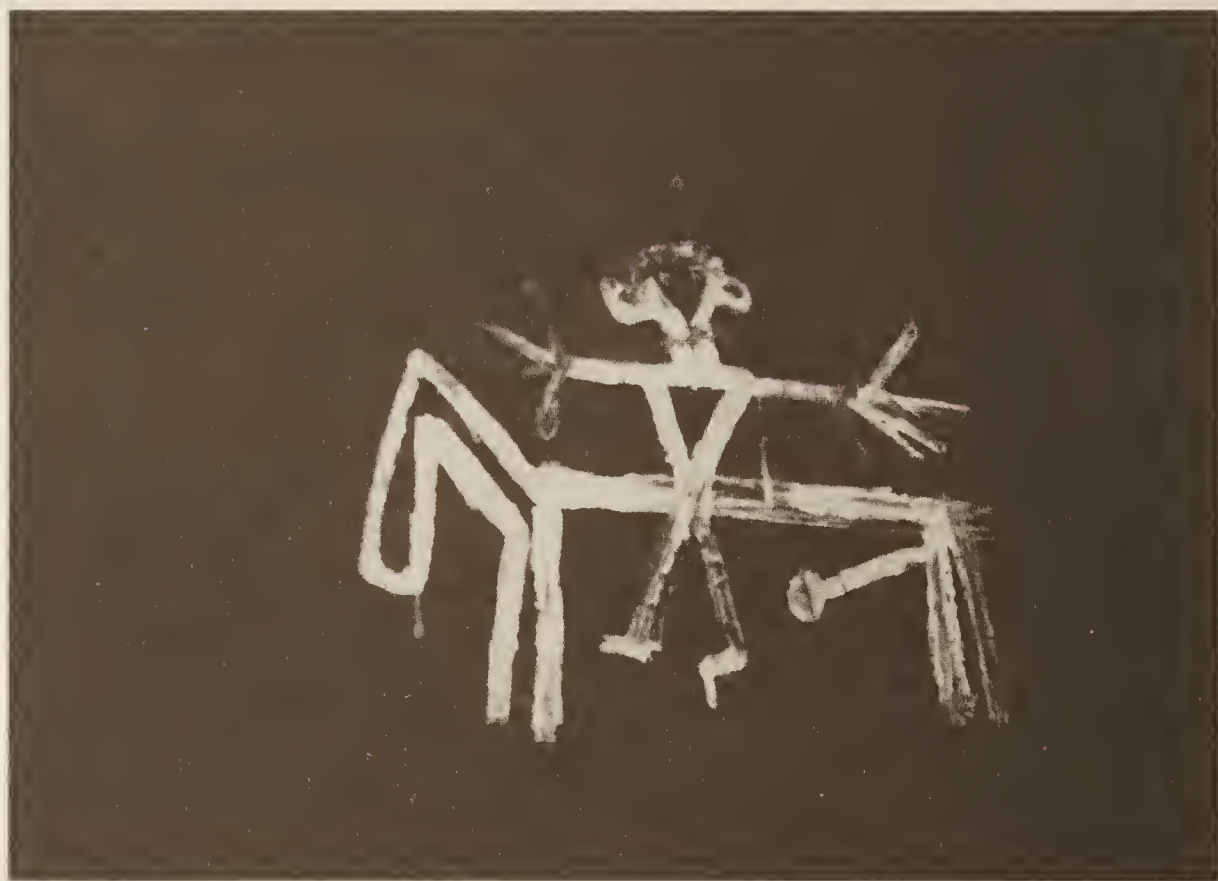
Saoras in Orissa, and from the charming paintings of the Warlis of Maharashtra, which depict in white pigment populous landscapes reflecting the everyday life of a rural community. The people concerned belong to tribes which have become sedentary. But among Hindus, whether urban or rural, it is also customary on festive occasions to paint pictures on the ground outside the threshold with the aid of the simplest materials, mainly rice paste mixed with pigment. In Maharashtra these paintings are known as *rangoli* and in Orissa as *ossan* or, alternatively, *jhunti*. This domestic art is the exclusive preserve of the women painters.

In addition to these amateur activities we also encounter two forms of professional painting. The first is found among itinerant showmen who supplement their dancing and acting with pictorial illustrations and are to some extent comparable with the medieval ballad singers and story-tellers of the West. Again, in the villages of Ma-

harashtra we find artists known as *chit-rakathis* or painters-cum-entertainers. This art, which cannot boast traditions as old as those of the theurgic paintings of the womenfolk, presupposes a general familiarity among audiences with the stories retailed to them in the manner peculiar to these wandering showmen. The pictures themselves derive, if in popular, simplified and dramatically concentrated form, from the artistically more refined performances provided for entertainment at court.

The third and last important group of folk art paintings consists of works done in the service of the temple. The innumerable pilgrims who flock to the holy shrines take away with them as mementoes of their journey cheap reproductions as a pictorial surrogate of the deities who have their permanent home in the temples. Today this enormous demand is met by brightly coloured prints. At one time Germany was the

most important source of such oleographs, the successors of hand-painted devotional pictures of the simplest kind. The production of the latter must have continued for several centuries, and a few examples, deriving from all parts of India, still survive. The unvarying themes were repeated over and over again by professional artists who had settled in the vicinity of the better-known shrines. But again, as in the case of the pictures painted by the itinerant storytellers, the tradition was of comparatively recent date and dependent on the continued survival of the places of worship with which the high religions of India were linked. In the region under discussion the most famous folk art paintings of this kind belong to the sphere of the Temple of Jagannath at Puri in Orissa. In this connection we might also cite the representations of deities carved in wood and painted in brilliant colours.

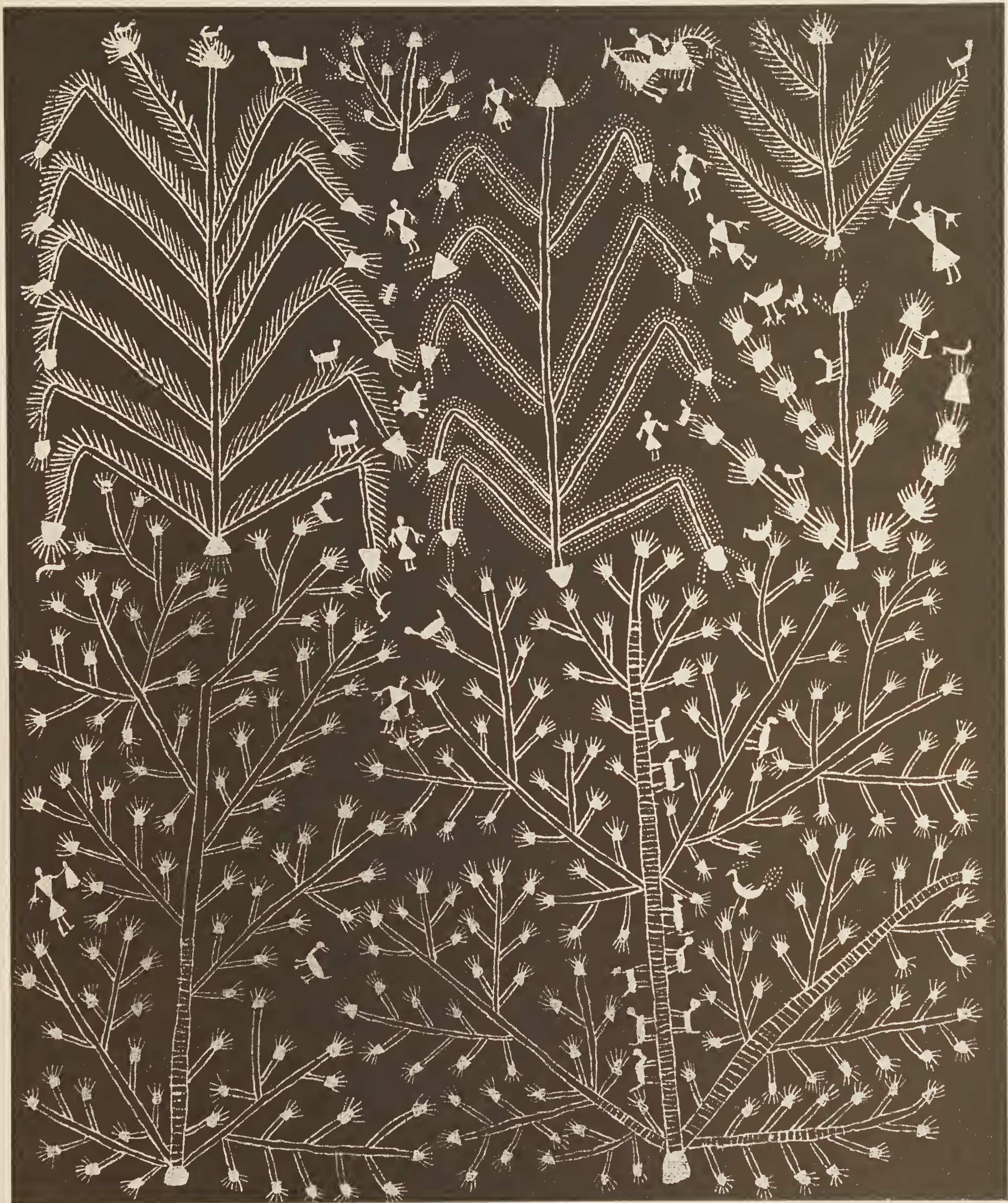


83 Tiger and hunting-scene carved on panel of a Kond door. Orissa.

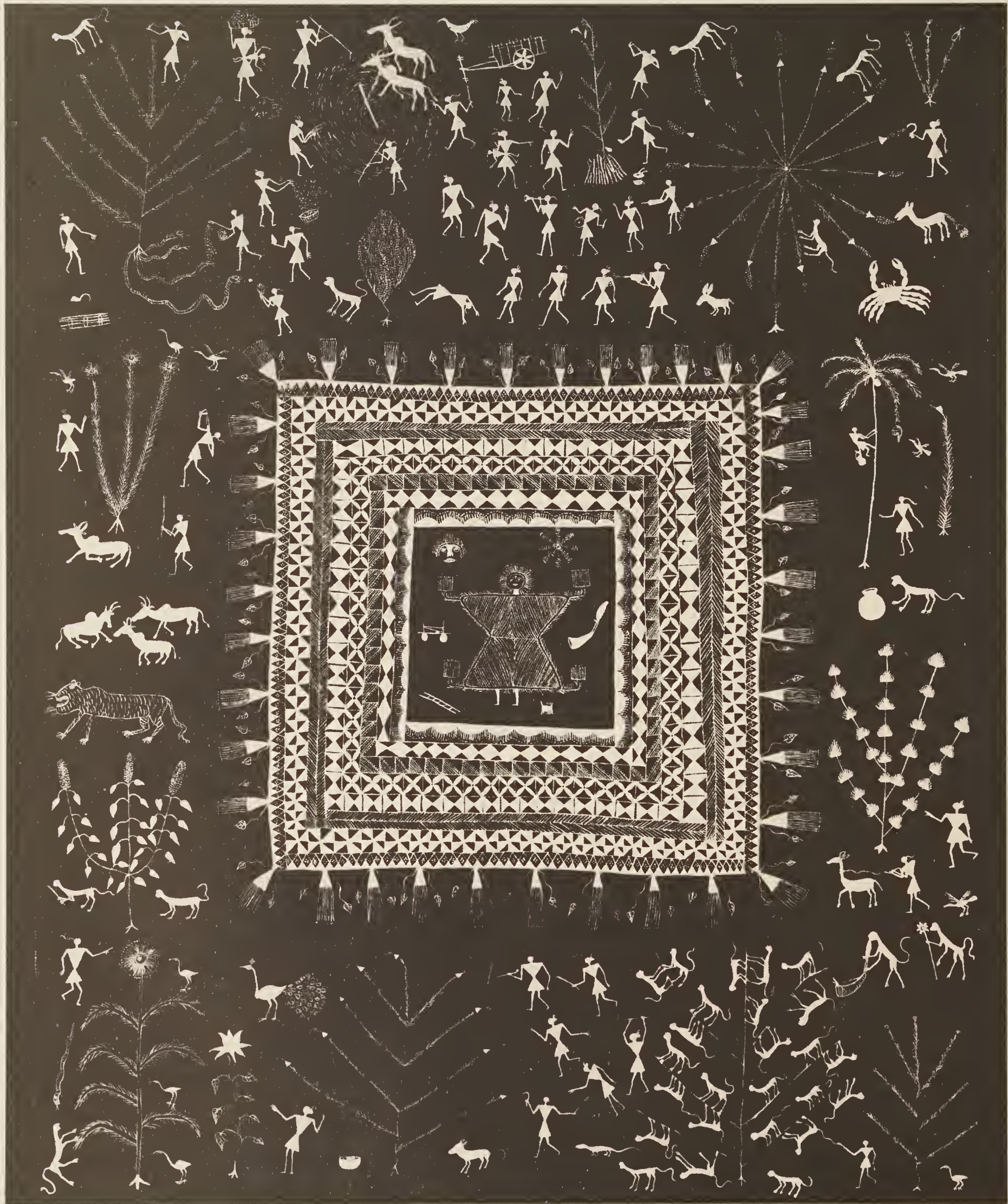
84 Equestrian figure.  
Kol wall painting. Chota Nagpur, Bihar.

85 Trees and figures.  
Warli cloth painting. Maharashtra, 100 x 83 cm.











The difference in length of tradition behind the above-named types of folk painting may perhaps be defined in terms of visual tradition and of verbal tradition. Visual tradition concentrates on the picture as such, the pictorially conventionalized, universally comprehensible formalization of a figure, be it man, beast, plant or geometrical motif, or again, on the simplest combination of these individual images, the aim being to produce an easily assimilable group statement. Here, nothing is left unsaid save what is commonly known and felt by a given social community.

Verbal tradition, on the other hand, presupposes a knowledge that is not strictly visual and formal, but rather extends to linguistic concepts and must in consequence first be “translated” into visual expression. Needless to say, verbal tradition is also based on conventions that are generally understood by any one community, whether small or large, but at the same time leaves the door wide open to divergent if not mutually exclusive conventions. The latter may lead to extreme compression, to a species of cryptic picture language. The broadening and narrowing down of comprehensibility are both characteristics of the further development of what we propose to call verbal tradition. On the other hand visual tradition has remained relatively constant, being linked to certain communities and changing only when the visual subject matter of any one community changes, when, for example, the hunter’s weapons are superseded by the peasant’s plough. In more recent times, the repertory of, say, the Saoras, has actually extended to railway trains, motor-cars and bicycles.

India’s visual tradition patently originated in the central Indian zone, while everything which may be ascribed to the verbal tradition either arose at a later date or else is of outside provenance. So far as India as a

whole is concerned, the most important documents engendered by tribal continuity are the pictographs of the Saoras and the Warlis, as also the wall and floor paintings of the Gond and Kol tribes.

Among the Saoras and the Warlis the function of thaumaturge is confined mainly if not solely to women whose magic medium is the picture. In the present state of our knowledge it is not possible to say whether conclusions concerning prehistoric times can properly be drawn from the circumstances prevailing today.

By way of qualification, we must again stress that the visual tradition as such has not remained uninfluenced by social developments. As educational standards rise, so the conventions of the verbal tradition inevitably impinge on the visual tradition, thus increasingly blurring the distinctions between the two. The domestic art of the women which, in accordance with our definition, serves to perpetuate the visual tradition, has been infiltrated by myth-laden subject matter, by traditional village folklore and by symbols interpreted in conformity with ecclesiastical canons. The result has been a gradual transition to a kind of illustrative presentation which may be assumed to be generally comprehensible in the context of a uniformly Hindu environment. While the earlier elements of the visual tradition are still in evidence, they have become incidental, mere decorative adjuncts to the composition, and are transformed into apparently arbitrary, unconsidered forms, many of them of an almost abstract nature. Generally speaking, then, it may be said of the two-dimensional arts as practised by women amateurs—and here we refer not only to floor and wall paintings, but also to textiles—that this particular form of folk production perpetuates the earliest known arts and crafts of the subcontinent—*rangolis* in Maharashtra, *alponas* in



Bengal, *kolams* in southern India, *mandanas* in Rajasthan, and so forth. Throughout the country this most important branch of the women’s domestic crafts, though varying in nomenclature, nevertheless remains to a large extent constant as regards the nature of its forms. For instance the pictographs, which appear in the rock paintings, recur in Harappan picture writing, in the characters on early coins, in the tattoo marks displayed by the Indian tribal population and, finally, in the designs of the *rangolis*, *alponas*, etc. Thus they constitute the earliest and most enduring stock of Indian artistic forms. The non-plastic arts have proved to be the most consistent as well as the most important of all the representational arts. These important findings have necessarily involved our anticipating here at least part of the discussion, to be elaborated in subsequent chapters, concerning the traditional structure of Indian art forms.

It is interesting to note how much emphasis is accorded in their paintings by all the aforementioned central Indian groups to the representation of the house as an abode defined by a rectangle. The Saoras place this rectangle at the centre of the picture and fill it with figures of the most diverse

86 Warli cloth painting. Rabha Ghulsada, Maharashtra, 135 x 105 cm.

87 Tiger. Pat-painting, Orissa.





kinds; among the Warlis the rectangle also occupies the central position, but here it contains a frontally posed and highly stylized human figure—a corn or fertility goddess—of imposing size. Though the content may vary, there is a marked similarity of form. Needless to say, these pictures, through the emphasis placed on the dwelling house, differ radically in content from the prehistoric cave paintings. The theme recurs frequently in the *alpona* paintings executed by women on the ground outside their houses, but here they also comprise the dwelling of a deity, in Hindu popular art

usually the goddess Lakshmi. Outside this region, and notably in the Pahari tracts in the north-east of India, these local deities sometimes merge with the representation of the house to become, as it were, a house in human guise.<sup>26</sup> Almost always the composition is determined by “houses” of this kind. Other elements such as humans, animals, plants, implements and vehicles, are disposed, now in roughly symmetrical rows around the central motif, now freely and apparently arbitrarily in groups. Monkeys clamber in trees, birds perch upon the branches or roost upon the roofs of houses.

88 Krishna playing his flute. Pat-painting, Orissa.

As regards content, these compositions constitute a rich source of visual information on all aspects of life—information which, as it were, immediately leaps to the eye.

An entirely different set of assumptions on the part of their audiences is called for by the *chitrakathis* or painters-cum-entertainers who, with the help of pictorial illustrations, provide a vivid and idiomatic account of events from the national epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Here the dwelling-house plays no part; indeed the activity of this type of story-teller is characterized rather by the fact that he moves from village to village and thus enlarges the range of his audiences. In the central Indian zone these showmen are found mainly in the border areas between Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, while the most important group consists of the Paithan painters, so called after the town Paithan (formerly

[26] HANDA, O. C., *Pahāri Folk Art*, Bombay, 1975, pp. 44 ff.



89 Female musician. Pat-painting, Orissa.

90 The god Marai.  
Kol wood carving. Yeotmal, Maharashtra, height 37 cm.













**91/92/93** Paithan paintings executed by painters-cum-entertainers. Maharashtra. 19th century.

Following pages:

**94** Elephant. Bronze sculpture. Daimabad, Maharashtra, 2nd half of the 2nd millennium B.C., height 19 cm.

**95** Buffalo. Bronze sculpture. Daimabad, Maharashtra, 2nd half of the 2nd century B.C., height c. 20 cm.













**96** Gond spirit figure.  
Wood. Mandla, Madhya Pradesh, height 68 cm.



**97** Upper part of a Koru memorial stele.  
Wood. Amraoti, Maharashtra, overall height 50 cm.



**98** Dancer's mask with handle. Wood.  
Height 47 cm.





**99** Female figure.  
Wood carving, tribal art. Bastar, Madhya Pradesh,  
late 19th century, height 57 cm.



**100** Goddess.  
Wood carving, tribal art. Madhya Pradesh,  
height 52 cm.

Following pages:

**101** Brass head of Shiva.  
Maharashtra, early 19th century, height 23 cm.

**102** Brass head of a goddess.  
Maharashtra, 12 x 10 cm.













**103** Man and wife.  
Bronze casting, tribal art. Madhya Pradesh,  
height 9 cm.



**104** Betel-nut box on wheeled elephant.  
Dhokra brass casting. Madhya Pradesh, height 38 cm.

**105** The goddess Khali.  
Terracotta. Madhya Pradesh.











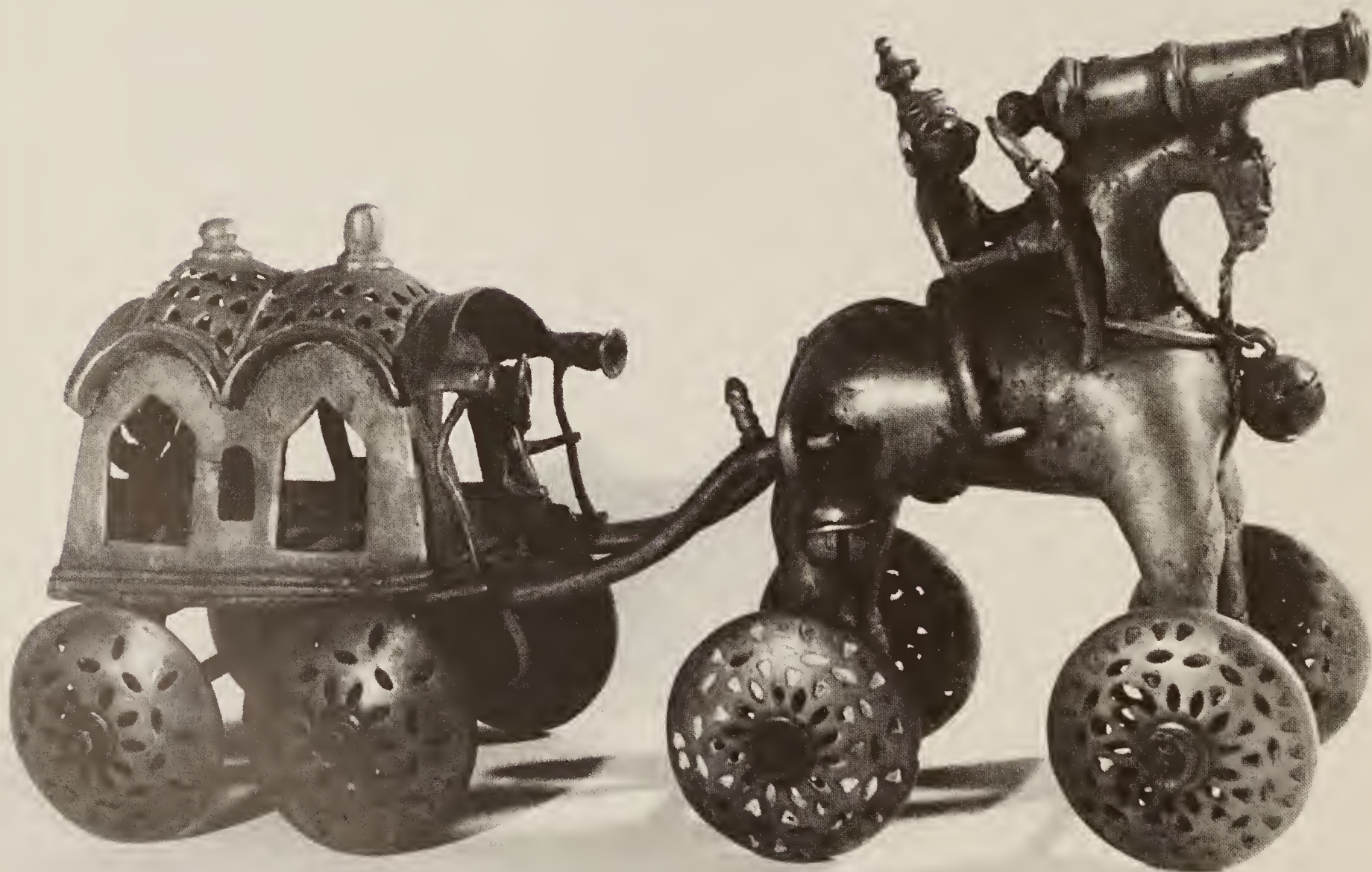


**106** Vithoba, a local version of Vishnu/Krishna,  
mounted on a horse.  
Copper plaque. Maharashtra, 8x7 cm.

**107** Wheeled ram.  
Terracotta. Maharashtra, 10x13 cm.



- 108 Elephant with riders.  
Brass inkstand. Maharashtra (?), 20 x 22 cm.
- 109 Horse-drawn battle car with cannons.  
Brass. Maharashtra (?), 22 x 37 cm.







**110** Painted ox-cart. Wood.  
Maharashtra (?), length 58 cm.





**111** Large ceremonial lamp with rat, the vehicle of Ganesha. Brass, Maharashtra, 30x12 cm.

**112** Brass door lock in the form of a lion. Maharashtra (?), length 15 cm.

**113** Copper ewer. Dhokra work. Madhya Pradesh, height 30 cm.









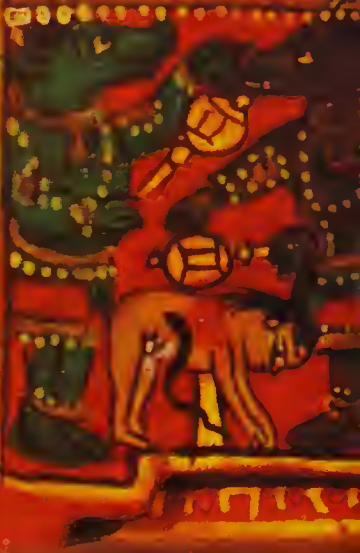
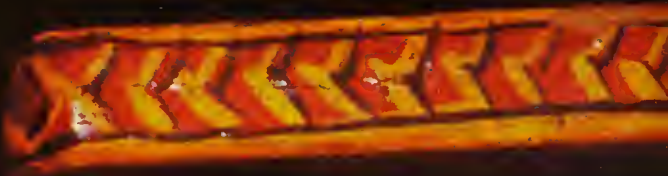
114 Round playing-cards.  
Orissa,  
diameter 7 cm.

115 Wheeled tortoise.  
Wood and coconut shell.  
Orissa, length 17 cm.













**116** Painted box altar with scenes from the life of the god Jagannath. Wood. Orissa, height 34 cm.

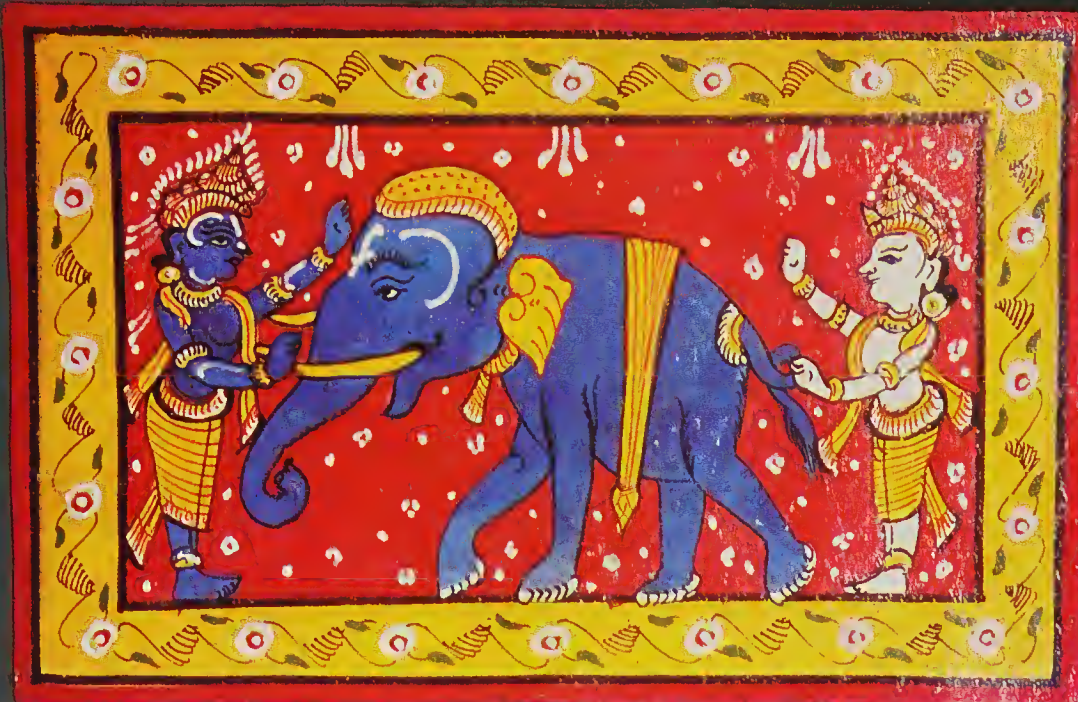












Preceding pages:

**117** Painted wooden figure of the god Jagannath.  
Puri, Orissa, height 62 cm.

**118** Snake goddess Manassa. Pith mask.  
Goalpara, Assam.

**119** Pat-paintings.  
Puri, Orissa, height (or width) 14 x 14 cm.

**120** Woman churning butter.  
Brass hide scraper. Gujarat, height 9 cm.





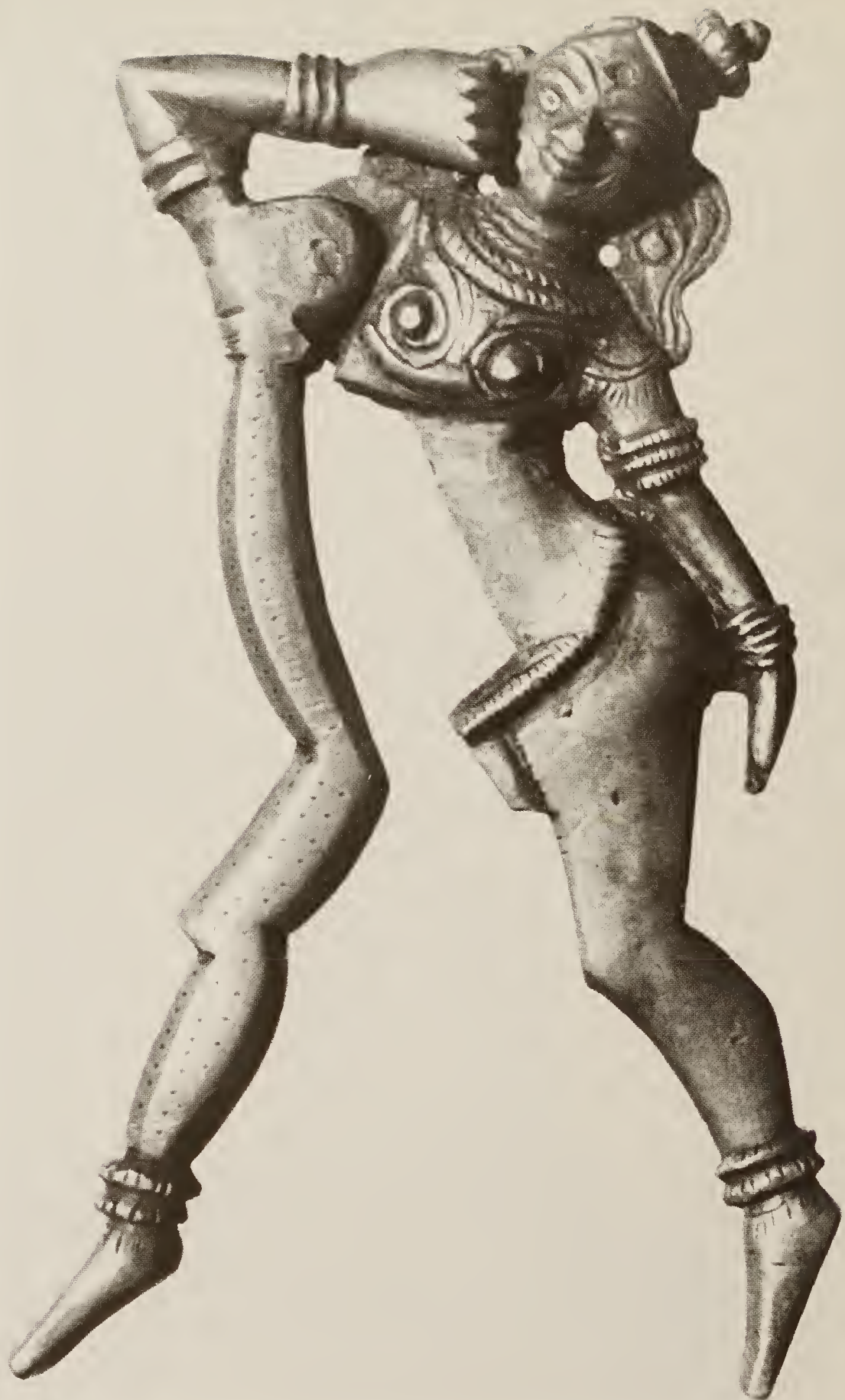




**121** Loving couple. Brass nutcracker.  
Maharashtra (?), length 12 cm.



**122** Woman and child. Brass nut cutter.  
Maharashtra (?), length 16 cm.



**123** Woman. Figurative nutcracker.  
Brass. Maharashtra (?), height 12 cm.





**124** Wick trimmer in the shape of a bird.  
Brass. Maharashtra (?), length 14 cm.

**125** Vegetable cutter in the shape of a bird.  
Iron. Assam (?), 16x30 cm.









**126** Harp-like musical instrument. Wood. Maharashtra (?), height 75 cm.



**127** Headhunter. Wood. Naga country, height 50 cm.

**128** Naga headhunter. Painted wood, height 49 cm.

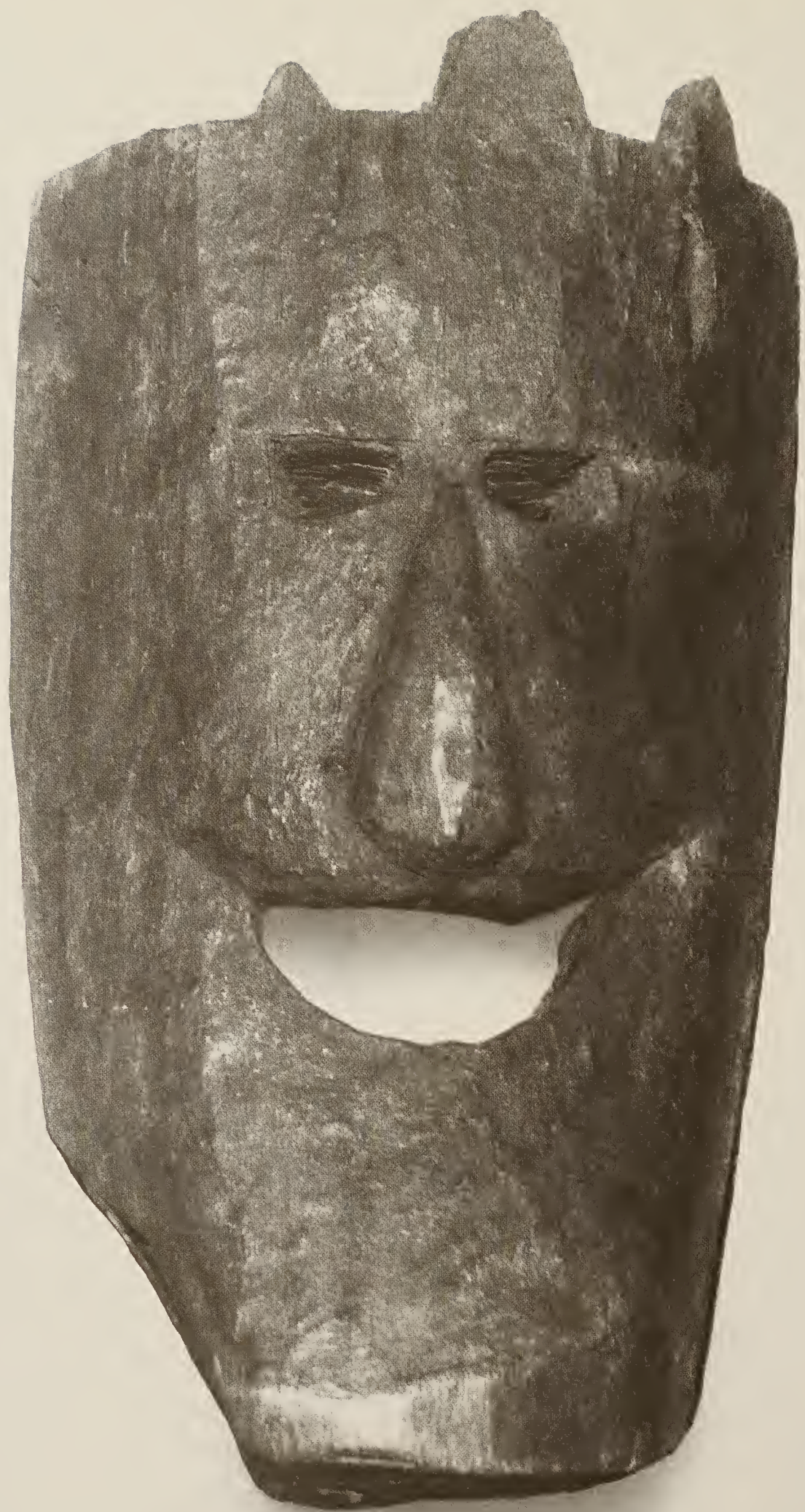


**129** Warrior. Wood. Naga tribal art, height 12 cm.

**130** Seated man. Wood, hair and feathers. Naga country, height 34 cm.











**131** Naga mask. Wood.

**132** Carved wooden figure. Naga tribal art.







Pratishthan)<sup>27</sup>. A number of these professional painters-cum-entertainers are also known to practise in the north, in Rajasthan, for instance, where itinerant *par*-painters entertain their audiences with epics, mainly the *Pabujukipar* which they illustrate with picture scrolls. Some of the latter may be as much as twelve metres long and can hardly, therefore be assimilated at a glance.<sup>28</sup> Itinerant professional Hindu story-tellers, the *jadupatuas*, have been noted in Bihar and Bengal and, as may be seen from many of the surviving scrolls, their audiences were predominantly tribal, consisting of the Santals who had settled in these regions.<sup>29</sup> Again, southern India was also the home of such itinerant story-tellers who have left us documents in the shape of painted wooden cabinets that could be unfolded and set up like a kind of altar to display illustrations, chiefly of the Vishnu legends and, in particular, of the life of Krishna.<sup>30</sup> Among these itinerant showmen we should also include those—in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, for instance—who

entertained their audiences with two-dimensional articulated leather puppets.<sup>31</sup> Broadly speaking, the puppeteers found in all other parts of the subcontinent might also qualify for inclusion here.

That the traditions of pictorial story-telling in India date back to the heyday of the great Gangetic States would seem to be borne out by a number of allusions to the subject in the Sanskrit literature. Patanjali refers to the *saubhikas* who disseminate moral and religious doctrines among the people with the aid of pictorial illustrations (second century B.C.). Again, illustrations, mainly depicting hell, of stories concerning Yama, the god of death, are described in Vishakadatta's play *Mudrarakshasa* (c. fifth century B.C.) and Bana's *Harshacarita*.<sup>32</sup> The content and didactic nature of the paintings of these itinerant story-tellers are a clear indication of their connection with Brahmanic-Hindu beliefs, and the beginning of this form of folk art may therefore be assigned to the time of the Gangetic culture and to have been to some extent dependent on religious art. It has also been suggested that the Buddhist narrative stone carvings on the gates of Sanchi are in effect scrolls that have been, as it were, unfurled and applied to the surface.<sup>33</sup>

In the context of the present book, this group of non-plastic arts may generally be regarded as having especial significance. For it testifies to the fact, supported by early literary sources and the more recent products in this field, that popular painting belongs to a tradition going back several thousand years. Quite independently of princely ostentation and orthodox ecclesiastical art, it was responsible for disseminating the non-plastic arts amongst the people and thus may be seen as forming an incontrovertible link in the continuity of folk art. Hence the considerable gaps in India's pictorial heritage may be attributed solely to the im-

permanence of the materials employed and the consequent disappearance of early pictorial documents. There can be little if any doubt that popular painting of this kind has continued without interruption for well over two thousand years, if not considerably longer. Indeed the earliest surviving folk art pictures of this kind, among them the Paithan paintings which are of particular importance in the present context, evince certain stylistic affinities with such large wall paintings as have come down to us, while the continuous pictorial sequence of the narrative suggests a direct connection with the compositions of the early Buddhist reliefs at, for example, Bharhut and Sanchi. In addition to the *chitrakathis*, there is another group of professionals, the *pat*-painters, who are also deserving of mention. These men met the demands—as indeed they still do today—of the innumerable worshippers who flocked to the shrines at Puri in Orissa. Unlike the purely two-dimensional art of the *chitrakathis*, their devotional painting was intimately connected with the work of other craftsmen who were also engaged in supplying the pilgrims. The products concerned consisted in the main of votive offerings in the shape of small clay figurines (nowadays chiefly of wood and painted) which were offered up to the deities, not only in the more important temples, but also at innumerable village shrines. In this sphere we possess sufficient material to enable us to trace the whole course of a still living tradition of several thousand years' duration. A great advantage here is that a number of the clay figurines had been fired and hence rendered durable. Indeed we possess small cult objects of this kind that date back as far as the early historical phase of the Harappan culture.

However, in the pictorial tradition of painted devotional objects which, for the most part were taken home by pilgrims as

[27] RAY, E., "Documentation for Paithān Paintings", in: *Artibus Asiae*, XL, 4, 1978, pp. 239–282.

[28] JOSHI, O. P., *Painted Folklore and Folklore Paintings of India*, Delhi, 1976.

[29] ARCHER, M., *Indian Popular Painting*, London, 1977, pp. 15–65.

[30] ICKE-SCHWALBE, L., "Betrachtungen zur volkstümlichen Hindukunst in Südost-Indien", in: *Abhandlungen und Berichte des Staatlichen Museums für Völkerkunde Dresden*, 31, 1970.

[31] DAS GUPTA, T. K., "Indische Schattenspielfiguren mit Affendarstellungen im Hamburgischen Museum für Völkerkunde", in: *Mitteilungen aus dem Museum für Völkerkunde*, Hamburg, NF 7, 1977, pp. 53 ff.

[32] RAY, E., "Documentation for Paithān Paintings", in: *Artibus Asiae*, XL, 4, 1978, p. 243.

[33] RAY, N. R., *Maurya and Śunga Art*, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 51–72.





mementoes of their trip, we may also descry—and this notably in Puri—a close affinity to the amateur work of Orissa. The remarkably abstract armless figures of the three deities in the Puri temple are encountered again in domestic wall paintings. Moreover, as frequently pointed out, the tribal population which has settled in that district also looks upon the Puri Temple as a holy place.

Here we find, not only representations of the three deities—Jagannath, his brother Balarama and his sister Subhadra—and other Puri gods, but also scenes from the life of Krishna, from the epic *Ramayana* and so forth. The majority of these pictures are painted in brilliant colours, predominantly blue and red, on rectangular or circular

pieces of stiffened cloth and, later, reinforced paper or board. Other equally popular subjects, with a tradition going back several centuries, are the striking composite figures known as *navagunjars* or *saravans*. The style is characterized by the use of bold outline and a comparative paucity of figures which, for the most part, are presented in profile, the only exception to the latter rule being the gods themselves. In a field so abundantly endowed as the folk art of India, the *pat*-paintings of Puri are noted for their quality and popularity.

There are no Hindu equivalents of the form taken by the three deities at Puri, namely two male figures and one female. On the other hand the Santals possess a similar trio and this may very possibly be a case of a

Hindu modification of original tribal conceptions. The images in the Puri Temple which, in effect, are no more than abstract wooden posts surmounted by heads, also suggest a similar derivation. As Mildred Archer has recently pointed out, very similar figures, in particular wooden head-pillars, occur in tribal art in Bihar and central India<sup>34</sup> where the original wooden carvings have been periodically renewed. In addition, innumerable small replicas of these objects, also of wood, have been, and are still being, made. This perpetual reproduction must be regarded as a typical feature of the folk art tradition. But whereas clay figurines are found on archaeological sites, and thus may be traced back over thousands of years of Indian history, no such sources exist for archaic wood carvings and, indeed, the only evidence we possess of the ancient origins of this technique lies in the preference shown by the tribal artist for this material.

As has already been said, very little is now being produced in the tribal territories that might be described as representational art, nor can Verrier Elwin find very much to cite in this line aside from house painting. True, he describes the tribal population of the



134 Animals, plants, warriors, dancers, train and motor-car. Saora pictograph, Orissa.

135 Wall painting executed by women. Orissa.





North-east Frontier provinces as wood-carvers, but otherwise finds nothing worthy of note save the relatively rich field represented by the highly individualistic textiles of the women.<sup>35</sup>

While small articles of everyday use, such as tobacco pipes and combs may be made of wood (though other materials are also sometimes used), wood carving is largely

[34] ARCHER, M., *Indian Popular Painting*, London, 1977, pp. 106-110.

[35] Cf. also GANGULI, M., *Reise zu den Naga*, Leipzig, a more detailed study than that of ELWIN, V.

[36] DHAMIJA, R., "Masks in India", in: *The Times of India Annual* 1967. Cf. also: *Marg*, XXII, 4, 1969, p. 28.

reserved for ritual objects. Funerary pillars and portraits of the deceased form part of the cult of the dead. The manufacture of masks worn by dancers and mimic actors is fast declining, though the number of masks still extant in Indian tribal territories is difficult to ascertain. Moreover it is a field to which scholars have not devoted much attention.<sup>36</sup> Today village dancing, more especially the *chau* dancing of eastern India, has become the main province of the mask which has thus lost its original transformative, magic character. We know from a semi-circular face mask found in Kalibangan, an object closely related to the Bhil masks from the same north-western region of India, that this form of wood-carving also possesses a long tradition. Although the masks derive from a territory that belongs by right to the next chapter, they are referred to here because we possess very little in the way of witnesses to this ancient craft other than the masked hunters and dancers in the early rock paintings. It is generally assumed that face painting preceded the use of the mask and, indeed, many wooden masks today—as for instance those of the Baigas in Madhya Pradesh—are painted or sometimes additionally tricked out with feathers and pieces of fur. Gourds and coconut shells are also sometimes used in place of wood. Amongst the Buddhist populations of northern and north-eastern India we find a comparatively large number of masks in the likeness of spirits and demons. However, these belong to a tradition that is largely non-Indian, nor has their form very much in common with Indian masks which are often flat, with apertures cut in them for the eyes and mouth.

Far more ambitious from the artistic and creative point of view are the wooden figures, many of them life-size. These objects, the work of the Naga head-hunting warriors, were supposed to be temporarily



inhabited by the souls of the deceased whom they portrayed. Wood as well as loosely plaited bamboo was used in the making of these habitations for the dead. According to the information supplied by Elwin, the Morung centres, in which the male members of some north-eastern tribes lived together in dormitories of one or more rooms, proffer an exceedingly rich store of wood-carvings—warriors armed with their weapons, tigers, elephants (sometimes two-headed), monkeys, dancing couples and so forth. The forms of the carvings are boldly defined, while the detail—hair, ornament, dress and tattoo marks—is separately applied.

No less richly decorated are the wooden funerary pillars of central India, the most celebrated being those of the Bison-horn Marias. Various scenes that do not readily admit of interpretation are lightly incised on them after the manner of a drawing—ploughing scenes, men riding horses or elephants, women squatting in labour, to name only a few. We know that such pillars were sometimes, but by no means always, commissioned from Hindu craftsmen by the Marias.

In the central Indian tribal area we find

136 Ploughing scene.  
Saora pictograph, Orissa.

137 Country scene.  
Saora pictograph, Orissa.

138 Solar symbol.  
Saora pictograph, Orissa.



wooden steles decorated with relief carvings which are closely related to the large group of so-called memorial stones, amongst them the *sati* stones and the pillars commemorating heroes. Such steles occur in many parts of the subcontinent as, for in-

stance, in Gujarat and Rajasthan (where they are attributed to the Bhils, that is to say a Hinduized tribal community), as well as in the central region. In southern India, where they are also found, they are often used as vehicles for lengthy inscriptions. These

funerary pillars and, indeed, the entire group of commemorative stones, have been variously interpreted. Some believe them to be borrowings by the tribes from the monuments of already established Hindu communities, while others regard them as



139 Jagannath temple and deities.  
Detail of a Puri wall-painting, Orissa.





140 The three deities of the Jagannath temple.  
Pat-painting. Puri, Orissa.







the creation of the original indigenous population. At all events, the commemorative steles of the Korkus in Madhya Pradesh are situated in the immediate vicinity of early rock paintings, and their subject matter, as often as not armed horsemen, may be compared with later prehistoric paintings of that type. Hence the lack of conformity between orthodox Hindu beliefs and the subject matter of the funerary pillars and steles might suggest that this whole group of monuments originally belonged to the sphere of tribal art. Yet it should be stressed that it represents a later period, while at the same time giving new and richly pictorial form to certain aspects of the early pillar cult. Accordingly it will not always be possible to draw a clear distinction between tribal art on the one hand and village folk art on the other. As Stella Kramrisch very rightly contends, the creative force of tribal art in India has to a large extent been lost and has become part and parcel of the development of village art.<sup>37</sup> Whatever the case, the content of the majority of tribal wood carvings is predominantly defined by non-Hindu beliefs, to the continuity of which we have already drawn attention on more than one occasion. When carved wooden figures of deities occur in central India, as, for instance, in Orissa, they are in fact local in character and bear a closer resemblance to the figures of spirits and ancestors than to the typical major divinities of orthodox Brahmanic religion. As regards materials, too, we would again point out that the use of stone as opposed to wood denotes a later shift to the sphere of the Hindu village. Painted artefacts have already been discussed at some length, and of textiles we would again remark that, in the tribal areas

[37] KRAMRISCH, S., *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribe and Village*, Philadelphia, 1968, p. 58 (Catalogue).

**141** Zoomorphic horn combs.  
Maharashtra (?), length 13 cm.



**142** Figurative and geometrical motifs, incised on  
bamboo by the Hrusso. North-eastern India.



of central India, but above all in the north-east, these arts are now at their zenith. Since the production of woven goods is a domestic undertaking which, until very recently has remained untouched by commercialization (and this also applies to the tribal sphere), those tending the looms in Assam and the Naga provinces are for the most part women. And it is here that they carry on the old traditions. Many time-honoured designs, often strictly geometrical in character, have been retained in the beautiful stuffs with their contrasting colours now woven by tribeswomen for the Indian market as a whole.

We now come to pottery and metalwork, the latter forming a fairly large group in central India. Both, by reason of their raw materials, may be subsumed under the category of village artisan's work. Neither the technique of firing clay, nor that of smelting metal here admits of any connection with, or uninterrupted continuity since, the period of archaic rock paintings, if only because the economic and technical prerequisites did not yet exist in early prehistoric times. The beginnings of ceramics and metallurgy are discernible only with the diversification of crafts and of modes of production in the earliest village communities. As we have already seen, archaeological remains in the western part of the region under discussion, that is to say in Maharashtra and in western Madhya Pradesh, would seem to point to the existence of early village communities of this kind, despite the fact that today (though this is, of course, subject to correction), the earliest witnesses to prehistoric Indian village culture tend to be concentrated in the north-west of the country. This is a circumstance that should not be overlooked when considering the folk art produced in central India today and in the recent past.

In her paper on the pottery products of the



Chota Nagpur district (Bihar) L. Icke-Schwalbe throws a most interesting light upon the relationship between the peasant community of the non-Hindu Oraons and the Hindu potters' caste of the Kumars (Kumbhakars) who work for them.<sup>38</sup> She tends to the opinion that the Hindu potters had themselves been at one time Oraons but that, as a result of social pressures such as professional tabus imposed by the caste system, they were ousted from what had formerly been for them a necessary and artistically meaningful occupation. This meant that their needs had to be met by Hindus whose profession was strictly governed by the rules of caste. Objects which for the most part now serve as toys would once have found use as votive offerings or as magical appurtenances for the home. For example, clay birds would be placed on the roofs of houses, a practice that is also adopted in central India, as the many carved and painted versions found there go to show. Their function was to safeguard and promote the material prosperity of the householders. Even though these doves,



chickens, peacocks and so forth derive from the southernmost part of Bihar, immediately to the north-east of Madhya Pradesh, they may nevertheless be compared as a group to many of the individual finds made in central India.

There is a close affinity between the potter's repertory of forms and that of the metalworker, so much so indeed that in some cases the techniques appropriate to the one material are actually applied to the other. Here it might be pertinent to recall that the two procedures actually coincide in the casting of metal by the lost wax or *cire-perdue* method. The first step in the process is the making of a wax model which is then coated with a mantle of clay and baked, so

143/144/145 Saora peacock roof finials.  
Wood. Orissa.



that the wax runs out leaving a space that is subsequently filled with the liquid metal. The initial stage of this process may be equated with that carried out by the maker of clay moulds.

In the folk art of central India we must distinguish between two main categories of metalwork. The first, the affinity of which to pottery has just been noted, is found in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa and is closely related to the metal casting of the north, although the processes used in Bihar and Bengal differ from those employed in Gujarat and Rajasthan. Like the pottery, these metal artefacts are produced mainly for the consumption of the sedentary tribal population. The second of the two main categories is to be found in the western part of the regions under discussion, that is, in Maharashtra, but with offshoots in southern India as well as in Gujarat and Rajasthan. The articles it embraces belong to a special branch of folk art and used to be manufactured by rural as well as urban artisans in response to the demand of the Indian middle classes in the concluding centuries of the colonial period. Objects of everyday use often assumed highly ingenious and pleasing forms—nut crackers, nut cutters, oil lamps, and small containers such as ink-pots and betelnut boxes, to name only a few. Taken as a whole this branch of metalwork constituted what might be described as a minor art

employing durable materials and catering for the relatively expensive tastes of the more well-to-do sections of the population. In those days, out-and-out luxury articles made of costly materials were confined to the courts of Muslim and Hindu rulers, while the rising bourgeoisie had to make do with copper, bronze and brass.

The first category is of greater interest so far as the traditional aspects of folk art are concerned, while the second group, comprising utilitarian pieces, often so charmingly designed as to constitute minor works of art, possesses an attraction that is all its own.

In central India metal sculptures are always manufactured by the same Hindu caste, the Kasars or Chasias, most of whom are said to be of tribal origin and to have become integrated with the Hindu caste. The extent to which their art has become Hinduized is more or less readily discernible from the choice of subject. Bastar district in Madhya Pradesh contains an old-established centre of the *cire-perdue* process in which brass and yellow metal, the latter an alloy with a high zinc content, are used in combination to produce what is locally known as *kaskut*. In one of the few papers devoted to this technique, R. Reeves has made an exhaustive study of these metal sculptures from Jagdalpur.<sup>39</sup> The examples she cites comprise the local deities of tribal villages as well as animals and horsemen. The latter, while retaining a stylized form peculiar to themselves, also recall the Bhil equestrian figures, dubbed “spirit riders” by Stella Kramrisch, which occur in the western part of the region.<sup>40</sup>

The metal articles manufactured for the Kutiya Konds in the south of Orissa constitute another distinct category. Here we encounter the metal wire process which is technically akin to the Dhokra work of Bihar and Bengal.<sup>41</sup> Threads of wax are

superimposed on a clay core and then, after being coated with several mantles of clay, are melted out by firing. Thus, when finished, the metal figure appears as if overlaid with a net. Kond wares comprise not only human figures of a secular character (musicians, women carrying pots), but also many representations of animals including the tiger, a motif which, though ancient, seldom occurs in high art. These pieces, which are more delicate in appearance and less monumental than the brass figures of Jagdalpur, bear some resemblance to the south Indian terracottas of Toda district in the Nilgiri Hills.

The wheeled animals already encountered in the early Daimabad bronzes (second century B.C.), are also frequently met with in the more recent folk art of the Dhokras in central India. Included among such pieces are the figures of a god and a goddess sheltered by an ornamental baldachino and mounted on an elephant which is sometimes but not always wheeled.

It has already been pointed out that, both from the social and the thematic viewpoint, the figurative metal objects manufactured for everyday use are completely different in character from those produced in Maharashtra and the adjoining areas. Here the human and animal figures are without any mythological connotations and their application to the articles concerned is as a rule dictated by purely aesthetic considerations. The comprehensive Raja Kelkar collection of works of minor art, which is housed in a Poona museum, comprises numerous light-hearted variants of, for example, nut crackers and nut cutters, in which the mechanical and figurative elements are ingeniously and imaginatively combined.

[38] ICKE-SCHWALBE, L., “Töpfererzeugnisse aus Chötā Nāgpur”, in: *Abhandlungen und Berichte des Staatlichen Museums für Völkerkunde Dresden*, 25, 1966, pp. 173–186.

[39] REEVES, R., *Cire Perdue Casting in India*, Delhi, 1962, pp. 75–100.

[40] KRAMRISCH, S., *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribe and Village*, Philadelphia, 1968, pp. 52 ff.

[41] Cf. BOSSERT, H. T. (Ed.), *Geschichte des Kunstgewerbes*, I, Berlin, 1928, p. 389 (Kond sculptures); REEVES, R., *Cire Perdue Casting in India*, Delhi, 1962, pp. 36 ff. (Dhokra technique).



- State frontier
- State frontier following watercourse
- - - not exactly fixed state frontier
- - - Indian state frontiers and national borders





# North-western India

# Site of the Earliest Urban Civilization in India

The second region we are about to discuss again comprises a number of Indian Federal States—Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana (eastern) Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir.

This area, from the Arabian Sea to its mountainous northern frontier, is, however, all that now remains to India of a far larger territory to which, culturally and historically speaking, Pakistan and parts of eastern Iran and of Afghanistan might also be said to belong. The actual geographical centre is defined by the Indus and its tributaries, five in number, hence the name Punjab or country of five rivers. Today the Indus region, Sind and the heartland of the Punjab, constitute one of the most important provinces of Pakistan. It was here, some five thousand years ago that the first political system came into being on Indian soil, at about the same time as, or perhaps slightly later than, the two earliest states in the Near East, Pharaonic Egypt in the north-eastern corner of Africa and Sumer in Mesopotamia, between the Tigris and the Euphrates.

The birth of these three states marks a profound caesura in the history of mankind, for it brought about structural changes—economic, social, political and cultural—of which the repercussions were felt, not only in Asia and Africa, but also in Europe. At this time India turned her face towards western and north central Asia, a process that was characterized, not only by cultural

parallels, but also by cultural exchanges, common interests born of progress and, at the same time, direct contacts occasioned by long-distance trade, the organization of which was as yet in its infancy. As recent studies have shown, the social upheaval in north-west India and, above all the social consequences of that upheaval, led to the establishment, along the west coast, of sea-borne communications with the southern portion of this vast subcontinent, the hinterland of which, however, as has already been seen in the last chapter, had been evolving over many thousands of years of prehistory. Hence we would be justified in assuming that, in addition to raw materials, traditional cultural elements were exported from central and southern India to the north-west.

In the north-west, however, the dichotomy previously discussed in connection with central India was already complete; on the one hand, and this was something new, the specialization of art in the service of the new ruling classes, on the other, the perpetuation of the prehistoric artistic tradition, though necessarily adapting itself to social change. From now on, the parallel development of these two trends was a portent of the future, not only in the region under discussion but in India as a whole. Throughout the subcontinent prehistoric art was evolving into true folk art, in other words an art practised amongst the people and by the people.

The north-west was the first part of India to possess the prerequisites for a developed agrarian society, without which the rise of large cities and the linking up of considerable tracts of land would have been economically out of the question. A developed agrarian society presupposes the existence of numerous villages and hence of village art and culture. And it is in the context of this village art that the art of the great cities of the Harappan culture—Harappa itself, Mohenjo Daro, Chanhudaro, Lothal, Kalibangan, Kot Diji and others—must be considered.

Not until several decades ago, when archaeological excavations uncovered layers dating back to the pre-Harappan period, was it possible to obtain any real idea of the urban culture that had then been in process of development. At two major sites, namely Kot Diji in Pakistan and Kalibangan in Rajasthan (India), archaeologists were able to trace the transition from what was an already developed village culture to an urban culture. The term Amri culture, from Amri, another site, has been introduced into archaeological terminology to describe finds of the pre-Harappan period.

Pottery remains the essential clue, painted and unpainted vessels being the most important guide to these early village cultures when it comes to identifying differences and correlations.

For the purposes of this enquiry we need do no more than state that, if local variants be



disregarded, a considerable measure of conformity becomes apparent in the types of find. These may be divided geographically and chronologically into three sub-groups.

1) Pre-Harappan village cultures which, in their earliest beginnings, were widely diffused.

2) Village cultures immediately antecedent to and then roughly contemporaneous with Harappan urban culture and found in the latter's immediate vicinity.

3) Post-Harappan village cultures, again far more widely diffused, being found as far afield as Maharashtra and central India.

If the above observation be further developed and generalized, it becomes clear that, seen in the context of these three stages, all these village cultures constitute a homogeneous whole.

Again, the village cultures of the post-Harappan period, such as the Malwa and Jorwe cultures in Maharashtra, are far more closely related to the early village cultures than to the urban Harappan culture. Such new cultural elements as emerge in the latter are to be attributed to developments in urban rather than in village culture. Just as, in many parts of India, today the semi-nomadic tribal population still continues to exist alongside sedentary Hindu villagers, so the villages preceded the towns, co-existed with them and continue to do so. The co-existence in India of different stages of socio-economic development was already a characteristic of those earlier periods when, if we take urban culture as an example, far-reaching changes in the social structure first occurred. The urban Harappan culture is, as it were, embedded in the pre-historical cultures of India.

From what has just been said, it follows that we must confine ourselves, when considering the territory under discussion, to more



recent material relating not to the prehistoric period, but rather to the existence of urban culture and art under the early political systems. It was in the towns that representational art attained its full flowering, although archaeological lacunae and difficulties of interpretation may tend to obscure this fact. Here, within one and the same culture, we encounter consummate artistic creations alongside infinitely less pretentious mass-produced articles. This contrast is apparent in urban architecture, as also in small everyday utensils which range from the simplest stone tools to metal instruments of a most ingenious and highly developed kind. The socio-economic contrasts prevailing in the towns also manifest themselves in the world of art.

The ample if not very comprehensive archaeological finds in the towns of the Ha-

rappan period permit of certain conclusions concerning those features peculiar to Indian art which were later to be referred to as its "national character". The chief of these, the exceptional adherence to archaic, traditional ideas and the fundamentally conservative outlook, may be deduced from the general picture of early Indian urban culture provided by archaeological discoveries. That such a conservative outlook prevailed is evident from the fact that it prevented the full exploitation of new economic and technical advances and militated against any radical endeavour to eliminate outdated techniques and modes of production. As compared with its contemporaries in the Near East, the early Indian class society appears almost crude, in that its internal contradictions are less marked and the course of its history so rigid and immutable that a development spanning a thousand years and more is today suggestive to us rather of a state of continuous stagnation. We have no certain proof of the existence in the India of those days either of temples, the bastions of an orthodox priesthood, or of palaces, the seats of princely rulers.

Nevertheless, these early Indian towns with their dense population, their planned development, their division into upper and lower towns surrounded by fortress-like walls, and differentiation between large, luxurious residences and wretched one-roomed hovels, already provide clear indications of the fragmentation of society. The perfecting of a system of weights and measures, the use of copper and bronze, precious metals and precious stones, the storage of large quantities of foodstuffs in public buildings expressly designed for that purpose, the existence of writing (as yet undeciphered) and, last but not least, the expansion of long distance trade and transport by land and water—all these are unmistakable indications of professionalization and specialization, of

146 Triple vessel.

Terracotta, Chanhu Daro, post-Harappan period.

147 Inkwell.

Chanhu Daro, Harappan culture.





**148/149** Standing figures of the mother goddess.  
Terracotta. Mohenjo Daro, Harappan culture.

a crucial turning-point in social and economic development. The standardization of, for instance, fired bricks as building material, of the seal to denote ownership, and of certain forms of vessel and decoration in an area of a size unprecedented in the world of that time, testifies to the existence on the one hand of an authoritarian minority, the rulers and, on the other, of a compliant majority, the ruled. Even though certain typical features may still be wanting or have yet to be discovered, there can be small doubt that what we are concerned with here is a political system and a class society. Are all these circumstances reflected in art too?

Here again, owing to the impermanent nature of the materials used in folk art, little survives of Harappan folk culture by comparison with the sumptuary arts. We are virtually confined, when seeking to distinguish between the art of the masses and the art produced for the benefit of their rulers, to hypotheses based upon an analysis of the style and content of the material at our disposal.

There is a marked difference in quality between the majority of mass-produced terracottas on the one hand and, on the other, the small stone sculptures, the comparatively rare metal sculptures and the seals, of which large numbers have come down to us. However, we should be guilty of over-simplification were we to regard this qualitative difference solely and exclusively as a characteristic of folk art. Nor would we be justified in dismissing as toys and thus under-rating, as has sometimes been done, what are often somewhat crudely executed terracottas. If, on the other hand, we take the intrinsic purport of these terracottas into consideration, the above-named categories (clay, metal, stone) will be found, with a very few individual exceptions, to relate to different social strata. Nearly all the terracottas portray women and animals, and

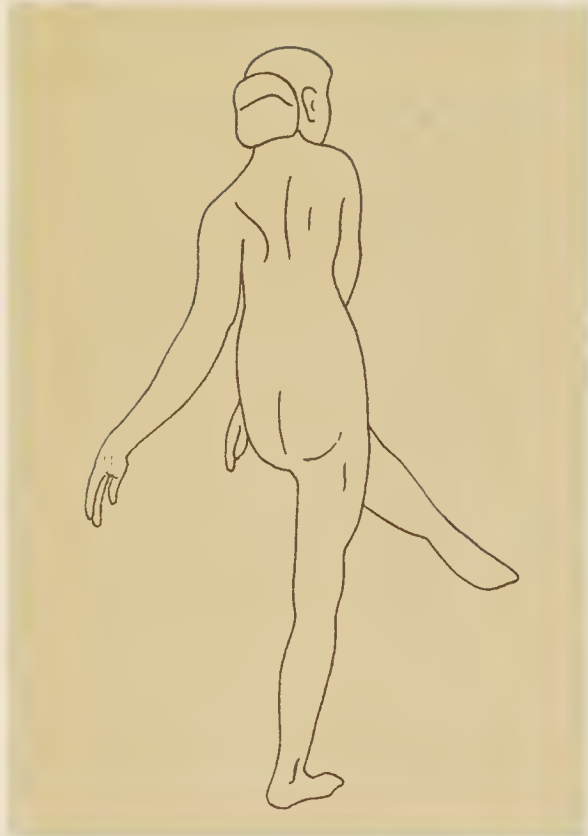


have been rightly associated with the widespread cult of a mother or fertility goddess. This would seem to indicate that the religion of the village communities had contin-

**150** Dancer.  
Terracotta. Mohenjo Daro, Harappan culture.

**151** Dancer.  
Bronze. Mohenjo Daro, Harappan culture.





ued to live on in the towns but had not yet turned into a typically urban religion. The early peasant believed that agriculture and cattle-rearing could be made to prosper and his issue be assured only by the worship, invocation and propitiation of those forces which promoted or hindered the growth of his crops, the propagation of his livestock and the perpetuation of his clan.

Here we must concern ourselves, not only with essential characteristics, but also with such details as may be gleaned from a consideration of earlier, prehistoric rock painting or which provide a pointer to later developments in Indian art. First we would draw attention to an important basic principle of figurative representation which applies both to terracottas and to stone sculptures and which may be termed the principle of latent mobility, in other words, the object is constructed in such a way that it can be set in motion. Here is should be noted that in general there is no evidence during the Ha-



**152** Reconstruction of movement of illustrations 153/154.

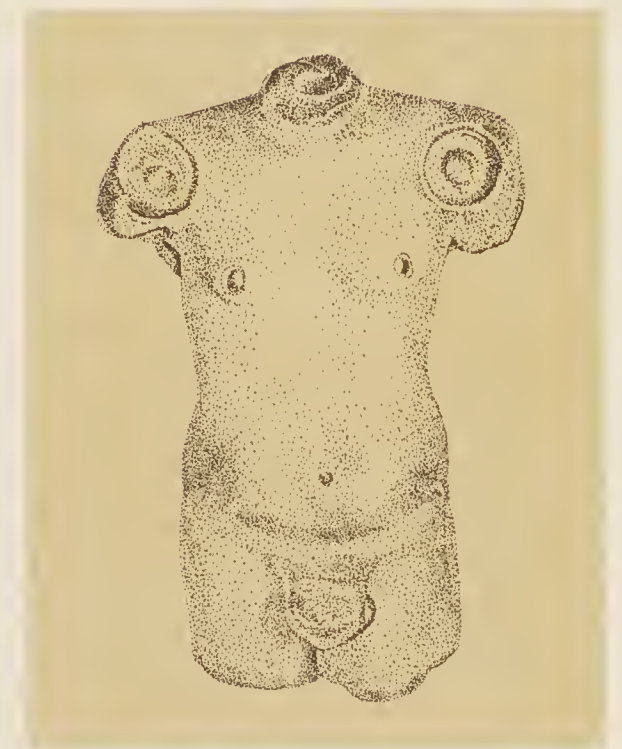
**153/154** Torso. Dark grey slate. Harappa.





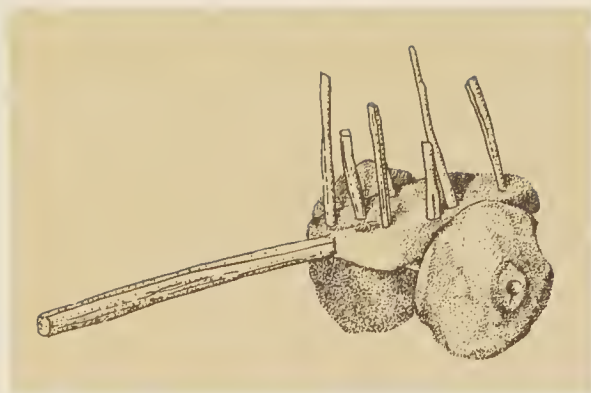
rappan period of monumental works specifically designed to remain permanently in one particular situation. Indeed, the vast majority of the artefacts known to us up till now consists of smaller pieces that are convenient to handle and easy to transport. If we now proceed from the general to the particular and consider the individual products of the Harappan culture, we find that a good number of the terracottas, either by the jointing of the head and limbs to the torso, or by the addition of wheels to the base of the figure, are not so much endowed with as capable of motion. Again we find in many of these terracottas the various phases of a movement expressed in the position assumed, not by the legs, but by the arms.<sup>42</sup> Besides this, a more statuesque quality is often apparent in what are, for the most part, painstakingly modelled female figures; frontally posed, with arms hanging loosely at their sides and long straight legs, they are

[42] MODE, H., *Indische Frühkulturen*, Basel, 1944, illustrations to the text 34a and 34 b.



155 Male torso.  
Red stone. Harappa.





most probably representations of the all-important mother-goddess. Some of the more notable of the small stone and metal sculptures are also expressive of motion. Here we need only mention the two stone figurines from Harappa and the small bronze dancing girl from Mohenjo Daro. What we have described above can hardly be attributed to coincidence resulting from the fragmentary nature of archaeological discoveries. As quantitative evidence in support of the above contentions we may cite comparable portrayals of animals on steatite seals. Here, however, save for a few exceptions, the animals are not represented in motion; rather, the manner in which their external surfaces are treated suggests, as it were, the motion of inhalation and exhalation, while at the same time, curves and hollows similarly express physical motion, the pulsating life of the skin.

So far as we are concerned, however, the principal clue consists in the exceptionally large number of small terracotta carts which, in many earlier writings on the subject, are regarded as children's toys. Yet analogies with the semi-industrial toy manufacture of today should not tempt us into extrapolating from the latter to the past or into using it as a criterion by which to interpret artefacts produced in totally different economic, social and cultural circumstances. Here we need only recall the cart and the heavy bronze animals on wheels from

Daimabad which were alluded to in the previous chapter.

What finds expression in the pieces we have just discussed is a preoccupation characteristic of Indian art both at this time and in subsequent epochs. As examples we need only cite the immense twelfth century Temple of the Sun at Konarak, a building of vast dimensions supported by gigantic stone wheels and conceived and erected in the form of a cart. Or again we might recall the Indian temple cars in which images of the gods, taken from the shrines, were carried in solemn procession through the streets. These more obvious instances are paralleled by countless later works of folk art depicting animals, equestrian figures and wheeled vehicles, all of which, though varying in quality and intended for different purposes, may be regarded as belonging to a constantly recurring type.

In interpreting the artefacts of the Harappan period, to which allusion has been made above, we shall necessarily be forced to rely on conjecture. Pride in what was the most important of the new technical advances, in the wheel and its applications to transport and the manufacture of pottery, may have found expression in a kind of generalized symbolic statement. However, it is also possible that the awareness of the cycle, of the self-contained motion of the wheel, of the unvarying repetition of a particular movement, was already being translated into symbols, foreshadowing, as it were, the Buddhist imagery of later times in which the *dharmachakra* or wheel of doctrine is intended to illustrate the imparting of Buddhist beliefs, their "setting in motion", but also and at the same time their intrinsic validity and perennial relevance. This would mean that the essential rudiments of a thinking and outlook of typically Indian stamp were already in existence in the Harappan period. What might be called a negative

confirmation of the above is the absence, already noted, of monumentality, of unique and durable representations either of persons and events or of immutable, permanently valid beliefs. Such attempts at interpretation call for the utmost caution; indeed, we should regard propositions of this nature as legitimate only if they take account of the whole history of Indian thought and culture.

The small artefacts of the Harappan period possess another marked characteristic which we shall now endeavour to elucidate if only because it was to play a role of considerable importance in later folk art. Our considerations here are based on similar pieces encountered today and in the more

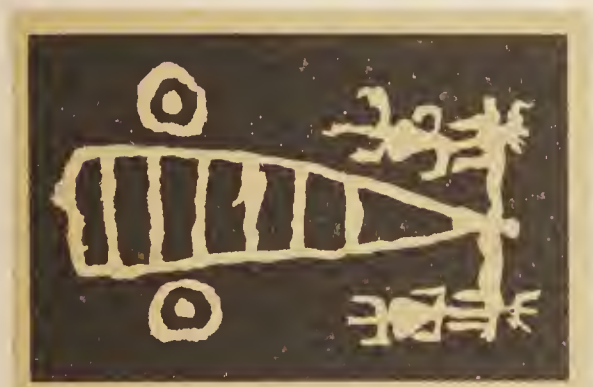


156 Cart. Terracotta.  
Chanhudaro, Harappan culture.

157 Animal with movable head.  
Terracotta. Mohenjo Daro, Harappan culture.

158 Wheeled animal.  
Terracotta. Chanhudaro, Harappan culture.





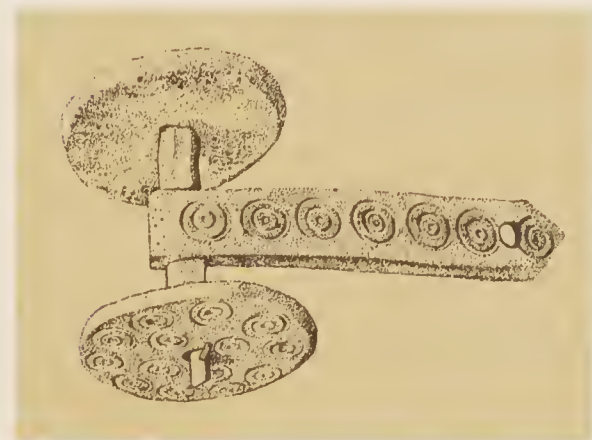
recent past. In many cases these consist of zoomorphic figures which are not only hollow but possess a circular opening beneath or on top of the head. For the sake of simplicity, we shall refer to such figures as hollow animals. Here the hollowness of the body is evident to the eye, whereas in the case of a group of rattles dating from the Harappan period, that quality is perceptible to the ear alone. In effect, these zoomorphic figures might even be described as musical instruments, for when they are shaken the loose particles within are set in motion and produce a percussive sound. However, in Mohenjo Daro archaeologists have also discovered fragments of terracotta figures of hollow construction in which an aperture is

plainly in evidence, a characteristic that is still more pronounced in a similar but better preserved example found at Chandoli in Maharashtra and believed to date back to 1200 B.C.<sup>43</sup> This vessel takes the form of a bull with a circular opening in its head.

Here an analogy with the numerous zoomorphic vessels found outside India might appear pertinent, were it not for the fact that the hollow animals of more recent Indian folk art cannot with any plausibility be described as vessels. If, however, the two characteristics mentioned above—hollowness and external aperture—be considered in the abstract, that is, without regard for their function, they will be seen to relate to other ideas which play a part in the later art of the country and, like the symbolism of the wheel, may be regarded as typically Indian. For identical characteristics are displayed both by early Buddhist rock temples and by Hindu cave temples of the same period. Similar caves are found in Orissa, some having an entrance in the shape of a tiger with gaping jaws. The space in the innermost part of the Hindu temple, the holy of holies, is known as the *gharba* or womb. This in turn recalls certain animals in archaic Indian rock painting which are held to be pregnant, since a smaller animal is discernible inside the body of the larger. It cannot be said with certainty whether these have any conceptual, symbolic or allegorical connotations. Nevertheless these remarkable conceptions are worthy of mention, the more so since over the millennia during which India's civilization evolved, they recur again and again, numerous examples being found, not only in prehistoric art, but also in the folk art of more recent times.

Hitherto we have been concerned with finds in the shape of small sculptures of the Harappan period, that is to say, archaeological material of which specimens are in fact

available to us. However, we should not forget that much early Indian art has been irretrievably lost. This applies in particular to the products of two-dimensional art, such as mats and woven textiles, as well as to domestic wall painting. All the more worthy of note, therefore, are the rare occasions on which the existence of one or other of these branches is attested by a chance find. The discovery, for instance, in a house at Kalibangan of a fragment of floor covering<sup>44</sup> with a repeat pattern of intersecting circles in horizontal and vertical rows confirms the theory put forward by this writer as much as thirty-five years ago<sup>45</sup> to the effect that such designs, which frequently occur on pots of the Harappan period, might be reminiscences of no longer extant paintings, a theory for which not a shred of evidence had been provided up till then by archaeological finds. It was generally believed that the houses of



[43] *Dawn of Civilization in Maharashtra*, Bombay, 1975, Plate 8 (Catalogue).

[44] KALIBANGAN cf. RAO, S. R., *Lothal and the Indus Civilization*, Bombay, 1972, Plate IV, c.

[45] MODE, H., *Indische Frühkulturen*, Basel, 1944, pp. 92 ff.

**159** Cart.  
Rock painting. Chibhar-Nala, central India.

**160** Bullock cart.  
Rock engraving. Mandori, Pakistan.

**161** Cart.  
Clay sherd. Early historic village of Inamgaon, Maharashtra, end of the 2nd millennium B.C.

**162** Model of a cart with tortoiseshell decoration.  
Champa, Bhagapur, Bihar.





that period were unadorned, sober and functional structures comparable to the industrial buildings of the present day. We now know that such was not the case. While some of these all-over designs—interlaces, intersecting circles, key fret motifs and others—occur on the rounded surfaces of pots or as details on seals and similar objects, they must originally have been applied to larger, flat surfaces and, in the case of geometrical motifs, were, perhaps, inspired by the arts of plaiting and weaving. We have already encountered a few examples of these motifs in rock paintings, though not in those of the earliest date. Hence it is perfectly possible to assign them to a period



contemporaneous with the art of the Harappan culture.

Moreover, certain scenes depicted on Harappan seals bear a close resemblance to those found in the rock paintings of central India. The most important scene, suggestive of ritual practices and long since recognized as a distinctive feature of the Harappan civilization, has only recently been discovered in a similar capacity in rock painting. The rites depicted here are centred on the bull and involve, amongst other things, bull vaulting and bull fighting, themes which may well have had their origin in the hunting of that animal. The underlying religious beliefs may be attributed to the early village cultures from which they percolated into the towns of the Harappan culture. Some indication of a connection between the cult of the bull and that of the mother goddess may be found in a group of figures from Inamgaon in Maharashtra, which dates back to about 1300 B.C. Here a female figure is seen standing on a bull. A seal from Chanhudaro provides further evidence of this connection.<sup>46</sup>

Other themes shared in common by Harappan art and rock painting include masked dancers, hunters, rows of dancing figures, and composite beings with several heads. Of particular note is the large seal from Mohenjo Daro depicting a god. Here we see what is a relatively rigorous symmetrical composition in which an ithyphallic, multi-faced deity wearing a buffalo horn crown and seated in a frontal, ascetic position, is shown surrounded by four animals, an elephant, a tiger, a rhinoceros and a buffalo. There can be no mistaking the fact that the animals selected for portrayal are the same as those we have already encountered in the paintings of the prehistoric Indian hunters. In this case, however, the combination would seem to point to an archaic and quintessentially masculine type, “the lord of the beasts”, the male antithesis to the goddess figures of that period.

In this seal, new ascetic features are found in combination with notions deriving from the prehistoric hunters. The beasts chosen are identical to those represented in the great bronzes of Daimabad in Maharashtra, nor is it unreasonable to suppose that this group might also belong to the Harappan period.<sup>47</sup> After that time some of these animals disappear from the repertory of Indian representational art, or at any rate figure less prominently therein. Only the elephant still retained the leading role he had played in every branch of Indian animal art since prehistoric times. The tiger, for its part, was at a later date to step down in favour of the lion, not because it had become

[46] *Dawn of Civilization in Maharashtra*, Bombay, 1975, Plate 9; MODE, H., *Das frühe Indien*, Stuttgart, 1959, Weimar, 1960, Plate 66.

[47] DHAVALIKAR, M. K., “Proto-Paśupati in Western India”, in: *East and West*, NS 28, Dec. 1978; DHAVALIKAR, M. K., “The Daimabad Bronzes”, in: *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 20. 4. 80, pp. 21–23.

**163** Zoomorphic vessel.  
Terracotta. Mohenjo Daro, Harappan culture.

**164** Rattle in the shape of a bird.  
Terracotta hollow ware. Chanhudaro, Harappan culture.

**165** Rattle in the shape of a female figure with aperture in the head.

Hollow ware. Chanhudaro, Harappan culture.

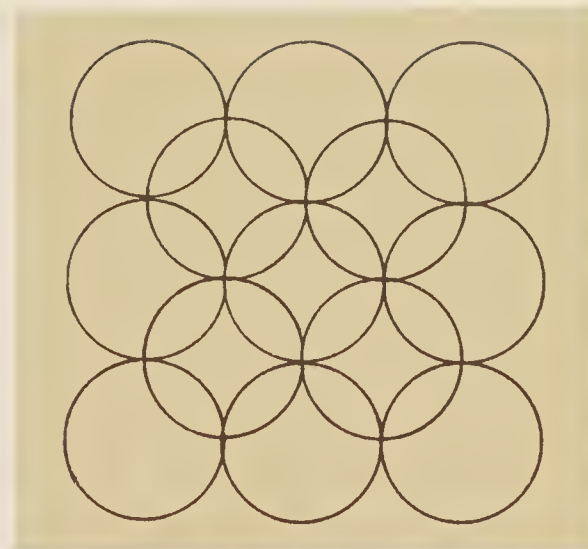


extinct in India but rather because it had ceased to be regarded as a symbol of power. In Indian folk art, however, as in the popular imagination, it still survives today as the most feared and therefore most highly revered of all the animals.

Harappan art is characterized by a veritable explosion of new themes, most of which are encountered again and again in the art of later periods. To illustrate and describe this wealth of themes would require far more space than is permitted by the scope of this book. We must therefore content ourselves with a brief enumeration of such figurative

and geometrical forms as figure prominently in the folk art tradition and have, for the most part, succeeded in retaining their popularity up till the present day.

In addition to the themes already discussed in connection with the Harappan period, we should further enumerate the following: animals, already encountered in rock art in the guise of so-called X-ray pictures, drawn in outline and containing other motifs (on pots and seals); the animal tamer, or male figure flanked by two tigers; one animal mounted on the back of another; a bird or crocodile holding a fish in its mouth; a polymorphous



**166/167/168** Overall designs consisting of circles and flowers.

Left: Vessel. Lothal, Harappan period.

Above: Schematic reconstruction of the design.

Right: The same design employed in contemporary folk art. Kumaon, Uttar Pradesh.





animal consisting of the forequarters of two beasts; multi-headed and multi-faced figures; a woman in labour; a procession with religious images and zoomorphic banners; birds in trees.

Among individual plants and animals we should also cite the humped bull, the buffalo, the tiger, the elephant, the rhinoceros, the fish, the peacock, the snake rearing to strike, a tree containing a zoomorphic emblem, the leaf of the pipal or Indian fig-tree and, finally, mountain motifs in the form of adjacent and superimposed circles or triangles.

The most important geometrical motifs comprise variations on cruciform, circular and rectangular shapes (often disposed in the manner of a Chinese box), the ancient Indian swastika, whirlwind and sun symbols, an octagonal shield (a scaled-down detail of an older repeat pattern), opposed triangles, two-headed axes, spirals, loops, labyrinths, scale and chequerboard patterns and the trident.

Many of these motifs also occur as pictographs in Harappan writing, in particular that of the bow and arrow, which still survives in the folk art symbolism of today in the form of a coloured token used in the Indian card-game *dashavatara-ganjifa*.

J. Appasamy has produced a remarkable paper in which she lays down a few important criteria defining Indian folk art<sup>48</sup>:

- 1) A predilection for simple outline characterized by a type of line drawing which dispenses with additional elements.
- 2) The simplification of colour and form so as to obviate shading.
- 3) The exaggeration of forms of expression, and a primitive disregard for proportion.
- 4) The stylization of motifs with a view to producing decorative elements.



169 Worship of a tree deity, with seven dancers in the bottom register. Seal. Mohenjo Daro, Harappan culture.

170 Deity crowned with buffalo horns and surrounded by animals. Plaster impression of a seal. Mohenjo Daro. Harappan culture.

171 Types of animals typical of the Harappan culture in early rock paintings. Hoshangabad, Madhya Pradesh.





5) The repetition of lines, whole figures and dots as an expression of intensified rhythm.

As will be readily acknowledged, these criteria are equally applicable to Harappan art and, in so far as material is available for comparison, also to that of prehistoric India.

Having experienced its heyday in the north-western part of India, the Harappan civilization faded away until, by about the middle of the second millennium B.C., no trace remained of this, the first political system to have established itself on Indian soil. The reasons for its decline have yet to be fully elucidated. It may have been occasioned by the arrival of warlike pastoral tribes speaking an Indo-European language—the self-styled Aryas or Aryans. Natural catastrophes such as floods or the dessication of the soil have, amongst other things, also been held responsible for the decline of the great Harappan culture. Where its cities had flourished there now dawned a new era that was to be of the utmost importance to the development of civilization. From later traditional literary sources, though not from archaeological finds relating to the period, we may perhaps deduce that this region was penetrated by the Aryans. The only document providing any information about their culture is the



[48] Cf. *Lalit Kala Contemporary*, 5, 1966, p. 3.

**172** Figure with buffalo horns in scratch technique. Rock painting. Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh.  
By way of comparison, schematic representation of the figure above.

**173** Figures with buffalo horns, incised on terracotta. Kalibangan, Rajasthan.





*Rigveda*, a collection of their own orally transmitted poetry, which were not set down in writing until a very much later date. The nomadic cattle rearers who roamed the land in search of grazing grounds were subdivided into a multiplicity of tribal groups who worshipped nature gods and were engaged in constant strife with the aboriginal population. The survival of village cultures in the post-Harappan period is attested by archaeological finds which, however, provide little or no evidence of any fundamental cultural change brought about by the arrival of the Aryans, by their disputes with the aboriginal population or by their own gradual adoption of a sedentary life. Nor do we know of any sculptures or other representations of the new Aryan deities or, for that matter, of the horse which, according to the Vedic tradition, now supplanted the bullock as trace animal and mount. Archaeological finds of the late second and early part of the first millennium B.C., in so far as they admit of interpretation today, would seem to indicate a conservative culture which, though varying from place to place, continued to cling to the age-old tradition. The only evidence of change is to be found in a certain tendency towards abstraction in the decoration of pottery at the expense of figurative representation and in the general impoverishment of the village crafts. However, this cultural impoverishment in the area under discussion was counterbalanced by the cultural

enrichment, to which we have already alluded more than once, in the neighbouring regions of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Here a love of art and of pictorial representation flourished, partly no doubt under the retrospective influence of the Harappan civilization, but partly, too, as a result of the absorption of new elements from the culture imported by the Aryans. The latter, however, did not themselves give artistic expression to that culture or, if they did—as is quite conceivable—the materials they used cannot have been of a durable nature.

A remarkable response to the cultural changes of the second millennium B. C., and one which was to leave its mark on the folk art tradition, was the importance accorded to the horse, an animal atypical of the Indian fauna. Though only to be inferred indirectly from the folklore of the present day and of the more recent past, that response is immediately discernible both in the art of the Bhils and in that of the later rock painters of central India. However amongst the Bhils—a now largely Hinduized tribe, the majority of whose many subgroups have settled in central India as well as in the north-west—the horse was not regarded as a domestic animal; rather, its

role lay in the sphere of religious belief and, more particularly, of representational art.<sup>49</sup> In this tribe's cult of the dead, the spirit rider is regarded as the representative of the deceased. Thus Stella Kramrisch sees a direct connection between the Bhils and the numerous representations of horsemen, since the latter are distributed over roughly



174 Bird perched on animal's back.  
Left: Sherd, Harappa.  
Right: Dhokra figure, metal. Bihar.

175 Crocodile and fish.  
Steatite seal. Mohenjo Daro, Harappan culture.  
176 Bird and letters.  
Seal. Lothal, Harappan culture.

177 Bird and child group.  
Motif in rock painting. Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh.  
178 Crocodile and fish.  
Coin. Taxila, Pakistan.  
179 Bird and fish.  
Wall painting in the Amber Palace. Rajasthan, c. 1700.





the same area as the former. In Indian folklore the horse became demonized, not only among the Bhils (in the form of a spirit rider), but also among the Aiyandar horses of the villagers of southern India as well as in early Buddhist reliefs in which appears a horse-headed demoness. All this and much else may plausibly be attributed to the introduction by the Aryan invaders of a creature terrifying because unfamiliar to the aboriginal

population. A concrete background to this observation is provided by a no less remarkable phenomenon, namely the patent depreciation of the horse in the art of later Indian high, as opposed to popular, religion, and the use by the major deities of native animals such as the bull, the elephant, the peacock and the lion (who, as we have just seen, had supplanted the tiger) either as attributes or mounts. Even Indra, the Aryans' most important god, is here shown riding an elephant instead of the horse of the traditional texts. Having lost its precedence in the world of the gods, the horse

[49] KRAMRISCH, S., *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribe and Village*, Philadelphia, 1968, pp. 52 ff. (Catalogue).

**180** Fish and two-headed polymorphous animal. Impression of seal. Mohenjo Daro, Harappan culture.



nevertheless retained a leading role, shared with the elephant, as a royal mount in sumptuary court art. Here we have an example of the interaction of popular and high culture, of which the results are paradoxical, to say the least.

The first millennium B.C. saw appreciable political and cultural changes in the territory under discussion. From the viewpoint of the subcontinent as a whole, this area constituted a kind of border zone which first fell under the immediate influence of Iranian-Achaemenid power and, soon after, became an arena for what might be described as a struggle for supremacy between the Hellenistic and the Indian cultures. At the same time, the centre of Indian civilization had shifted eastwards to the Gangetic plain from which the new religions, Buddhism and Jainism, made their way back to the north-west region and, indeed, beyond the cultural frontiers of India. As a result of the unstable political situation, more or less extensive areas of the north-west became, at relatively short intervals, the scene of Indo-Greek, Indo-Iranian and Indo-Kushanian encounters. Attacks by Iranian and central Asiatic tribes were followed by those of the Huns and, towards the end of the

**181** Vegetable motifs.  
Left: Potsherds. Lothal, Harappan culture.  
Right: Mountains, with leaf of the pipal tree. Kalibangan, Rajasthan.

**182** Fishes.  
Left: Harappan pictograph.  
Right: Kond carving, Bihar.





first millennium A. D., came the first clash with Islam and the beginning of a resistance which retarded for centuries the ultimate victory and establishment of that faith in the heartlands of the subcontinent.

In the first centuries of the second millennium Gujarat saw the efflorescence of book illustration and miniature painting, these being promoted by the wealthy community of adherents to the Jain religion, a community that was also responsible for the great temple buildings in the northern hill country of Gujarat. In Rajasthan and further to the north there came into being petty Hindu dynasties which, right up to colonial times, were able to put up an effective resistance to the penetration of the country by Islam. Here too there arose schools of miniature painting, known as the Rajasthan and Pahari Schools. All these paintings, though executed for the court and bearing its imprint, also betray the influence of folk art. But Gujarat and the northern hill country are noted, not only for miniature painting, but also for wood sculpture, an art which persisted until well into the colonial period. Wall painting, whether in huts or executed

by court artists for the adornment of palaces, are known to us only from the more modern versions of the former, in which the popular tradition is clearly discernible, and from restorations of the latter, which bear unmistakable traces of the influence of folk art. The same observation applies to wood carving and wood sculpture, the first originating in the province of the village craftsman, the second produced in the cities, notably those of Gujarat, for middle class patrons and petty rajas. Though these works have survived longer and more successfully than the wall paintings, they have today unfortunately fallen victim to the tourist trade in objets d'art, so that many houses and palaces have been stripped of their ornaments.

Despite the chequered political history of the region under discussion, all these arts have remained and still remain within the traditional sphere of village and urban craftsmanship; indeed, and this is especially the case in Gujarat, they still often bear the imprint of age-old tribal beliefs. This conservative awareness of tradition, this stubborn adherence to old forms of composition

and stylistic stereotypes in representational art may perhaps be attributed in part to the endeavour of the lesser Hindu dynasties, engaged as they were in resisting Islamic influences, to defend and perpetuate the true cultural heritage of India.

We have already referred to the art of the Bhils whose settlements still continue to form a link between western Gujarat and Rajasthan. From earliest times these people have been the custodians of traditional magical beliefs, the rituals that go with them and the images without which those rituals could not be carried out. It is still permissible to speak of Bhil art despite the fact that in the present day, at any rate, clay, wood and stone carving is carried out in the

[50] FISCHER, E., *Kunsttradition in Nordindien*, Zurich-Basel, 1972, p. 16 (Catalogue).

[51] JAYAKAR, P., "Some Terracotta Figurines from Tribal Gujarat", in: *Marg*, VII, 2, Dec. 1953, pp. 27-32.

[52] KOPPERS, W., "Monuments to the Dead of the Bhils and other Primitive Tribes in Central India", in: *Annali Lateranensi*, VI, 1942, pp. 117-206; HERMANS, M., *The Bhagoria Bhil*, Wiesbaden, 1964.



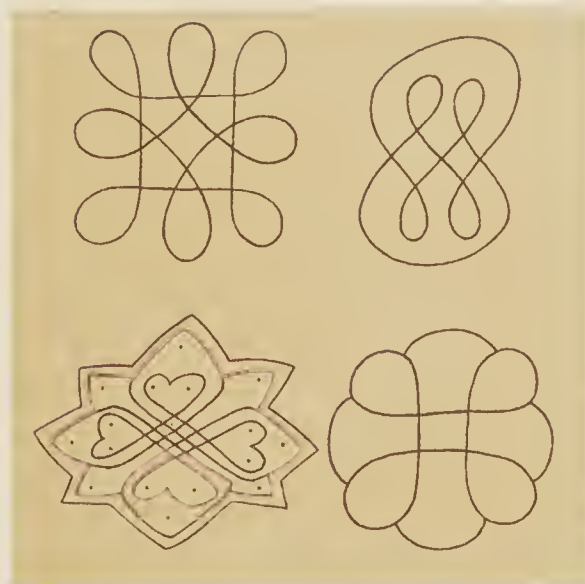
villages and smaller towns by Hindu craftsmen.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, it would seem that the wall paintings, known as *pithoras*, are executed by the Bhils in person, since they are done in honour of the Bhil deity Pithora.

Continuity in clay sculpture, from the Harappan period up till the present day, may be inferred from the existence of a large group of clay figures which are especially typical of the Surat region north of Bombay.<sup>51</sup> These figures are often very crude, if idiosyncratic in form and diverse in content, and P. Jayakar is doubtless justified in relating them to the funerary offerings in the shape of clay figurines found in the Nilgiri district in southern India. She further points out that these articles are produced by Hindu village women, since the Bhils are not allowed to engage in the manufacture of pottery. Early Indian peasant-village art, which continues to survive both in the terracottas of the Harappan period and in the Nilgiri figurines, finds a modern counterpart in these small Bhil sculptures. Thus the Bhils may be seen to have acted as intermediaries as regards both historical continuity and territorial distribution. For their terracottas comprise, not

only tigers and elephants, but also the exceptionally striking equestrian figures or spirit riders, to which allusion has already been made. Also worthy of especial note are the numerous hollow animal figures. An interpretation of the subject matter of the Bhil clay figurines enables us to draw certain conclusions concerning the groups to which they have just been compared, and which comprise figures employed in the cult of spirits and of the dead, as also in tree worship. While the magico-thaumaturgic beliefs of the earliest tribal culture predominate, they mingle in this impoverished region with local mother-goddess cults.

The important group of stone and, in some instances, wooden steles, which we have already encountered in central India, is once more exceptionally well represented in the region under discussion and has been attributed by the great majority of specialists to the Bhils.<sup>52</sup> In Gujarat, stones of this kind in commemoration of heroes are known as *patias* or *khambhas*, and consist for the most part in equestrian figures. In addition, we find *sati* stones erected in honour of those heroic women, or rather widows, who chose of their own free will to die on the funeral pyres of their deceased spouses. In this case,

too, the work was done by Hindu craftsmen and, indeed, these *sati* stones bear witness to the extent to which old tribal practices had been adopted by the Hindu population, since widow burning is regarded as a typically Hindu custom. In the classical art of India representational steles also figure



#### 184 Saltire.

Top: Faience plaque. Mohenjo Daro, Harappan culture.  
Bottom: Detail of painted decoration. Potsherd. Navdatoli, Madhya Pradesh.

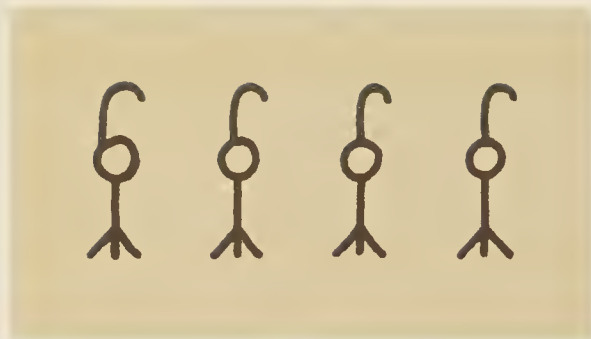
#### 185 Interlacing.

Left top: Clay plaque. Mohenjo Daro.  
Right top: Copper plaque. Mohenjo Daro, both Harappan culture.  
Left bottom: Rock painting. Sita Khardi, Madhya Pradesh.  
Right bottom: Contemporary folk motif. Kumaon, Uttar Pradesh.

186 Bust of a bearded man, his garment embellished with a trefoil design. Stone. Mohenjo Daro, Harappan culture.

187 Labyrinth composed of two parts. Rock painting. Tikla, Madhya Pradesh.





among the earliest sculptures. For instance, steles with figures of Yakshas and Nagas were often erected outside Buddhist places of worship, their purpose being to ward off the influence of malevolent spirits and demons. In such cases the nature spirits worshipped by the early peasant population were expected to assume responsibility for the protection of the stupas and monastic complexes. What we have here, then, is clearly another instance of the adoption by the high religions of earlier religious beliefs which they then proceeded to adapt to their own purposes. Revered and worshipped by the people, these old nature deities were retained by the priestly hierarchy in the subordinate capacity of guardians and tutelaries, while at the same time the people were still able to crave the protection of figures with which they were familiar. Here Yakshas, Nagas and tree deities act as it were as intermediaries in the refashioning, made manifest in the image, of ancient beliefs into new doctrines.

The domestic art and, indeed, the two-dimensional art in general, of the region under discussion is deserving of especial emphasis. For in a manner reminiscent of the Harappan culture, which spread from its heartland to Gujarat and to the south, the Bhils are dispersed over a wide area, being found, according to statistics, not only in southern India but also beyond that country's north-west border, in Pakistan. As we have already pointed out, the Bhils, like the Saoras and Warlis of central India, worship a local deity, Pithora, to whom animals such as the tiger and the horse are dedicated. In *pithora* paintings, equestrian figures play a leading role. The extension of the pictorial repertory reveals the existence in tribal culture of a special proclivity for assimilating what is new, particularly anything unfamiliar and menacing, into its own conceptual world, thereby anticipating, as it were, the

process of integration later to be attempted by the high religions. But whereas the latter seek to integrate the old into the new, the tribesmen are at pains to do the reverse. Amongst these people even the most modern conveyances—motor-cars, railway-trains and aeroplanes—are pressed into the service of the old tribal deities, deities who respond to magic and witchcraft and are still closely bound up with the world of spirits and demons.

In addition, the many textiles produced in this region suggest the existence of ancient and well-established traditions in the two-dimensional arts. For it seems highly probable that the origins of textile manufacture reach back as far as the Harappan period, although archaeological discoveries have failed to provide us with any documentary material that might point to such continuity.<sup>53</sup> However, we know that large quantities of cotton goods were exported from the majority of Indian ports on the Arabian Sea. Indeed, Gujarat is still known today for its (admittedly long since industrialized) cotton manufacture, while throughout the world popular types of cloth bear Indian names such as *sindon*, *calico* and *chintz*. Ports on the north-west coast have served as eponyms for some of these types—for instance *calico* derives from Calicut and *cambric* from Cambrey. We may be sure that, as early as the Harappan period, an age characterized by the division of labour, cotton weaving constituted one of the specialized crafts. India is believed to be the oldest producer of textiles and there is hardly any part of that country that is not noted for its wide range of woven goods. Besides the professional manufacture of textiles, the designs and pictorial embellishment of which may undoubtedly be said

[53] *Old Textiles of India* (text by SARASVATI, S.), Academy of Fine Arts, Calcutta, undated.

188 Horsemen. Tattoo mark. Central India.

189 Horse and rider.

Rock painting. Adamgad, Madhya Pradesh.

190 Contemporary equestrian stele. Gujarat.





to bear the stamp of folk art, cloth is also, as we know, woven and processed today in the private, domestic sphere, and from this it may be inferred that a similar state of affairs obtained in the past. It is comparatively easy to bridge the gap between the earliest textile products and those of the present time, and to establish an historical sequence by collating the frequent allusions to, and descriptions of, this subject in early Indian literature, and the illustrations of it in works of classical art. Unfortunately we possess

very few clues as to the origins of the art of weaving and its early history. Nothing in the way of direct information can be gleaned from rock paintings or from early village representational art, while the only clue from the Harappan period is to be found in a limestone bust from Mohenjo Daro of a man whose garment is decorated with a trefoil design. It may, however, be supposed that wall paintings and such items as mats and woven goods for use as wall-hangings or floor-coverings, were made for home

consumption. This theory would seem, at any rate, to be supported by the parallel found in wall painting and domestic textile manufacture in the folk art of today, not only in the region under discussion, but also in Bihar and Bengal. Here certain similarities may be discerned, both in the style of representation and in the repertory of motifs consisting of decorative designs and pictorial scenes. It may, perhaps, be significant that, in the tribal sphere, there should be a preference for textiles whose

191 Equestrian memorial steles.  
Korku tribe, central India.



decorative effect is achieved solely by the nature of the weave. In the domestic art of the villages, on the other hand, that effect is largely dependent on secondary forms of embellishment such as embroidery and appliqué work, which are added after the goods have been woven. Printed and, perhaps, also painted textiles, should be regarded as belonging to the professional sphere.

The important group of embroidered materials and appliqué work encountered in Gujarat, and notably in the remote provinces of Saurashtra and Kutch, may well be regarded as a branch of folk art which, to some extent, marks the transition from the early tribal tradition to what was a much later form found in the Hindu village with its traditional caste system and represented by the Bengal *kantha* and *sujani* embroideries

of Bihar. This rural art of Gujarat is attributed to the nomadic tribe of the Kathi who, according to legend, made their way into India from central Asia at a very early date.<sup>54</sup> The stuffs are distinguished by a very unusual technique in which chain-stitch embroidery is combined with appliqué work enhanced by small mirror-like insertions, sometimes made of glass, but for the most part of mica. The embroidery is characterized in particular by its wealth of forms and motifs. Conspicuous among these are polymorphous animals which may possibly derive from the pictorial repertory of Harappan art. Here we might cite a creature consisting of the forequarters of two animals, and an elephant-headed beast which may be either a tiger or a lion, for it is not always easy to decide what living animal has served as model in such cases. Many of the Kathi embroideries betray a certain measure of Hindu influence as, for instance, when they portray Ganesha, or again, Krishna playing the flute. Most of the subjects, however, consist of zoomorphic figures, men mounted on horses or elephants, symmetrically grouped animals and typical floral and foliate motifs. P. Jayakar is of the opinion that these Kathi embroideries constitute one of the most important contributions made by Indian women to rural folk art. The Mehr and Rabiri houses in Saurashtra reveal a no less wide variety of motifs. Here we may plainly discern a connection between the embroideries and appliqué work on the one hand, and the painted or clay and plaster decoration on the other. A constantly recurring motif is the continuous spiral, while no less typical is a form of free landscape painting in which individual trees and lotus flowers are distributed over the



192 Head of Shiva.  
Bhil brass sculpture. Rajasthan, c. 17th century.

[54] JAYAKAR, P., "The Kathi Embroideries of Gujarat", in: *The Times of India Annual*, 1968, pp. 73-80.





wall surface. Sometimes we may find a complete embroidery reproduced on the wall in polychrome paint. Also characteristic are the relief wall decorations executed in clay and plaster around recesses in which food or other objects are stored, or else isolating smaller areas of wall by serving as

frames for miniature paintings. A marked love of decoration is everywhere apparent. The use of glittering elements in the shape of glass and mica affords what is virtually incontrovertible proof that Kathi embroidery and the aforementioned ornamental reliefs are of common origin.

Differing from the above in style and subject matter is another group of Gujarat wall-paintings in which some of the imaginative individual motifs suggest certain parallels with the geometrical forms and delicately articulated zoomorphic figures found among the magic symbols proper to



ceremonial floor painting. Another theme encountered in these wall paintings, and also further north in the Pahari tracts, is one we have already discussed in connection with the Warli paintings of Maharashtra, namely a geometrical and schematized figure of a large, frontally posed female deity inside whom may be seen smaller figures and symbols.

We have drawn attention to these differences in style and subject-matter in order to show that domestic wall decoration, an activity that is confined almost exclusively to the women of the household, is also characterized by local peculiarities or by group features shared in common, irrespective of region. At the same time we should never lose sight of the fact that all belong to the age-old tradition of Indian folk art and that, by the same token, all must be seen as stylistically and thematically distinct from princely and orthodox religious art, even though they may betray its influence.

Of the north-west provinces and as already pointed out, central India, though not of the north and south, it may safely be said that their folk art, as the embodiment of the original artistic tradition, not only succeeded in retaining its identity, but also remained sufficiently vigorous to exert an influence upon court and temple art. Conversely, the latter's influence on folk art, and on the two-dimensional arts in particular, was confined almost solely to the transmission of a few Hindu themes.

In Gujarat, Rajasthan and the Pahari tracts, the lesser rulers and petty princes not only had recourse to the artisans of the surrounding villages, but also and at the same time accepted, to a greater or lesser degree, their artistic and creative traditions, without unduly exposing the artists to the sumptuary imperatives of court and temple. This is evident, not only from the paintings in the palaces themselves, but also from many of

the miniatures commissioned by the courts and from the wall hangings and representations of Hindu deities in the temple precincts. We shall presently be discussing typical instances from Rajasthan and the hill districts, but in Gujarat similar indications of the influence exerted by folk art are also to be found. Here we need only cite the wall paintings in the ruler's palace at Sihor near Bhavnagar in Saurashtra.

A special position is occupied by the cotton temple cloths from the famous textile school of Ahmedabad. We would remind the reader that Ahmedabad lies only a few kilometres north of Lothal, an ancient port dating back to the Harappan period, from which cotton stuffs were exported to countries further west as early as the second, if not the third millennium B.C. These temple hangings from Ahmedabad belong to the important class of so-called *kalamkari* textiles (*kalam* = feather, *kalam-kari* = featherwork). These are block-printed or painted cotton stuffs, the decoration of which required that the fibres should be treated with mordant colours. A remnant of cotton so dyed has been discovered at Harappa.<sup>55</sup> Today *kalamkari* cloths are not the sole preserve of Gujarat, for in southern India there is a highly productive school employing this technique, two of its more important centres being Masulipatam and Kalahasti in Andhra Pradesh. Remnants of printed cotton and silk stuffs dating from the eighth or ninth century have been discovered by A. Stein in Central Asia. Already long famous are the scraps of cotton cloth of Indian provenance, probably some eight hundred years old, found in Egypt at Fostat, the forerunner of present-day Cairo. In India the definition of the term *kalamkari* and the technique associated with it is today the subject of lively discussion. The debate revolves around the technical and stylistic characteristics that permit a distinc-

tion to be drawn between *kalamkari* cloths and chintz textiles. Both these terms were applied at a relatively recent date to what were already old-established techniques. The word chintz is said to derive from the Sanskrit *chitra* (coloured) or from the Gujarati *chit* (spotted). The Portuguese described such products as *pintados* (from *pinta*, spot), which means much the same thing.<sup>56</sup> In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when India was the world's largest textile exporter, there was a substantial market in Europe for these cloths. J. Irwin distinguishes between fine, hand-painted chintzes and ordinary printed chintzes. In the first case the mordant is applied freehand with a feather or brush, while in the second the pattern is printed on the cloth with the aid of wood blocks. Thus, interpreted literally, *kalamkari* signifies the finer category of cloth. We should not, however, lose sight of the fact that the distinctions drawn between these terms and the definitions applied to them are by no means always consistent.

Another very important distinguishing mark is the use of colour. In this connection, P. Jayakar<sup>57</sup> speaks of a great colour-belt extending from Sind in Pakistan to the southern border of Gujarat, a belt which tallies with what we shall call the ceramics belt, the ceramics concerned being the pottery of the Harappan civilization and of the village cultures which succeeded it. This territorial correspondence is not wholly confined to the use of identical earth colours for the painting of pots and the dyeing of cotton, but also embraces design and or-

[55] "Homage to Kalamkari", *Marg*, XXXI, 4, Sept. 1978, p. 19 (special issue).

[56] "Homage to Kalamkari", *Marg*, XXXI, 4, Sept. 1978, p. 67 (special issue).

[57] "Homage to Kalamkari", *Marg*, XXXI, 4, Sept. 1978, p. 26 (special issue).









namentation, both of which reveal astonishing similarities. She mentions as characteristics the absence of naturalistic plant forms and the predominance of stylized and geometrical motifs.

The cotton cloths displaying a more than life-size representation of the mother-goddess together with numerous secondary figurative scenes are known as *matani pach-hedi*.<sup>58</sup> They are believed to have been used originally by roving bands of Kolis and so-called Vaghri Gypsies, and therefore represent earlier tribal traditions which were also characterized by particular rituals and religious sacrifices. The bands of Vaghri Gypsies and Kolis have long since become members of socially inferior castes—pedlars, farm labourers and peasants of the lowest status. The temple hangings are printed in one of Ahmedabad's alley ways by members of the now sedentary Vaghri caste.

Book illustration and miniature painting belong to a later stage in the development of Indian art, as does the individual picture regarded as an entity in its own right. The stamp seals of the Harappan period might, indeed, already qualify as very small scale individual pictures, though here cut in stone and appearing in relief only when impressed. It is difficult to know whether we may posit continuity or a correlation in which the intervening links have been lost. It might be pertinent in this connection to cite the technique employed in decorating the walls of the terracotta temples of Bengal. Here similar, and often very small, reliefs are used for the purpose, singly, in rows or combined to form a larger composition. In the next chapter we shall revert to this form of popular art as practised in Bengal.

The Jain miniatures of Gujarat date from the first half of the second millennium A.D. Since the majority consists of illustrations of

religious texts, they cannot be said to belong to the genuine folk art tradition. The treatment of the figure recalls certain forms typical of folk art, for instance, the preference for the profile view, in which the otherwise invisible eye appears in projection beyond the contour of the face; also the disposition of the figures in rows or in a shield-shaped composition. All this is in marked contrast to the works of the later Islamic schools of miniature painting in India. The influence of folk art is even more marked in individual miniatures, as it also is in glass-paintings depicting popular Hindu deities. Most of these pictures originated in Saurashtra and Kutch in the south-west border areas of Gujarat to which we have already alluded more than once as being centres of the folk art of the present day and of the more recent past. Both the choice of themes and the naïve attempt to suggest depth and space betray the influence of European art, much as they did in the folk art of other parts of the country during the colonial period.

The wood sculptures of Gujarat are, on the whole, very different in kind from the carvings of the tribal craftsman already encountered in central and north-east India. Characterized by the transition of the craft from village to town, they are of very uneven quality, yet may often be exceptionally expressive, especially in the rendering of figurative detail. Of the best pieces, in particular, it may be said with complete justification that they are works of folk art, for they possess a very large measure of that artistic power of expression already noted in the style peculiar to early village cultures. The majority of wood sculptures and reliefs served to decorate the façades of houses lin-

[58] "Homage to Kalamkari", *Marg*, XXXI, 4, Sept. 1978, pp. 61/62 (special issue); also, FISCHER, E., "Das Tempeltuch der Muttergöttin aus Gujarat", in: *Archiv für Völkerkunde*, Vienna, 26, 1972, pp. 15-27.













**197** Elephant with howdah.  
Terracotta. Gujarat, 24x18 cm.



**198** Horse.  
Terracotta. Tribal art, Gujarat, height 8 cm.



**199** Female figure.  
Terracotta. Tribal art, Gujarat, height 14 cm.





**200** Sati stele. Stone. Gujarat.

**201** Battling horsemen.  
Wall painting. Sihor near Bhavnagar,  
Gujarat, mid-nineteenth century.





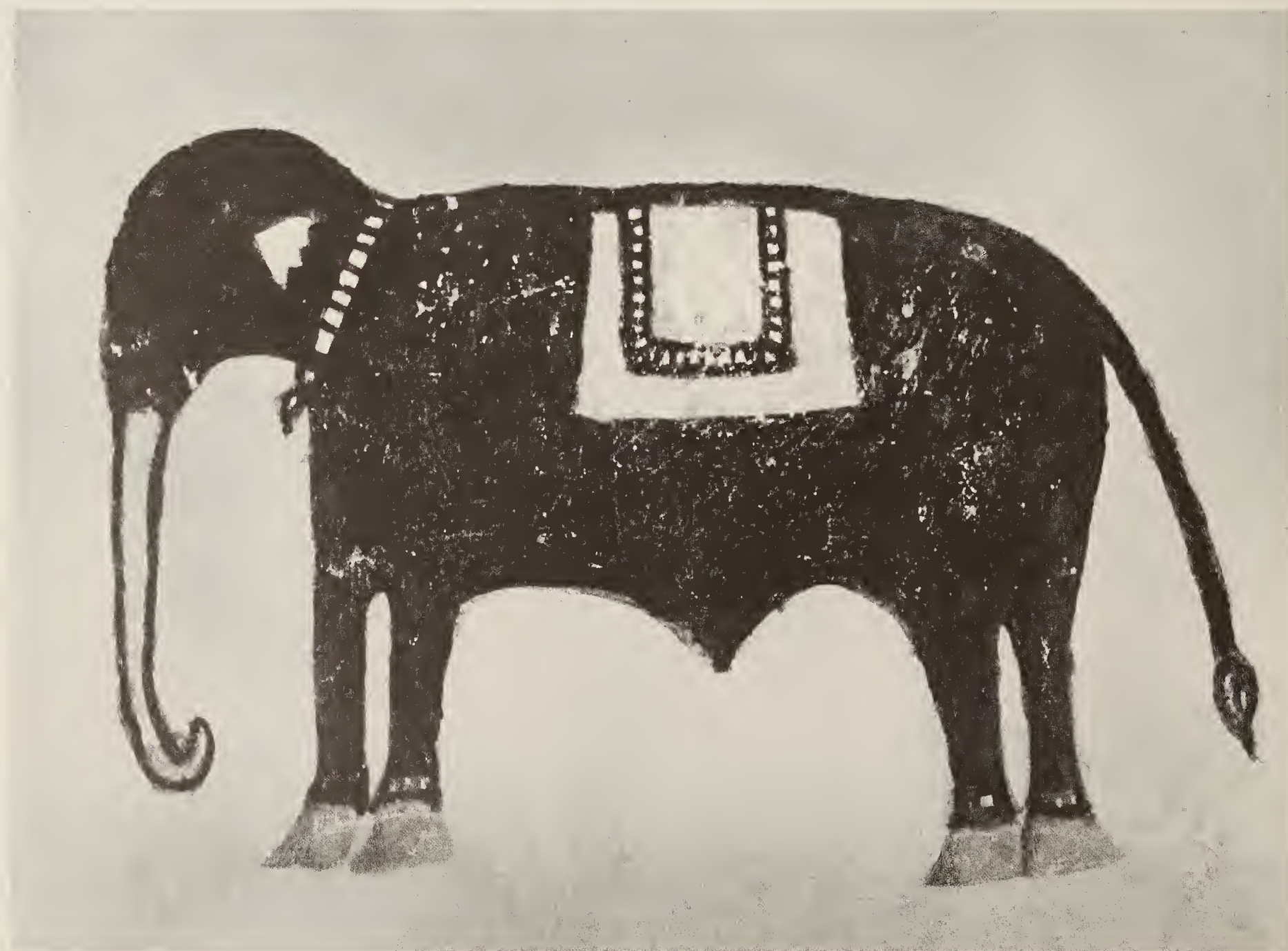


**202** Elephant.

Wall painting on a Rabari house in the village of  
Aud-dar near Porbandar, Kathiawar Peninsula,  
Gujarat.

**203** Stylized geometrical motifs.

Wall painting. Gujarat.



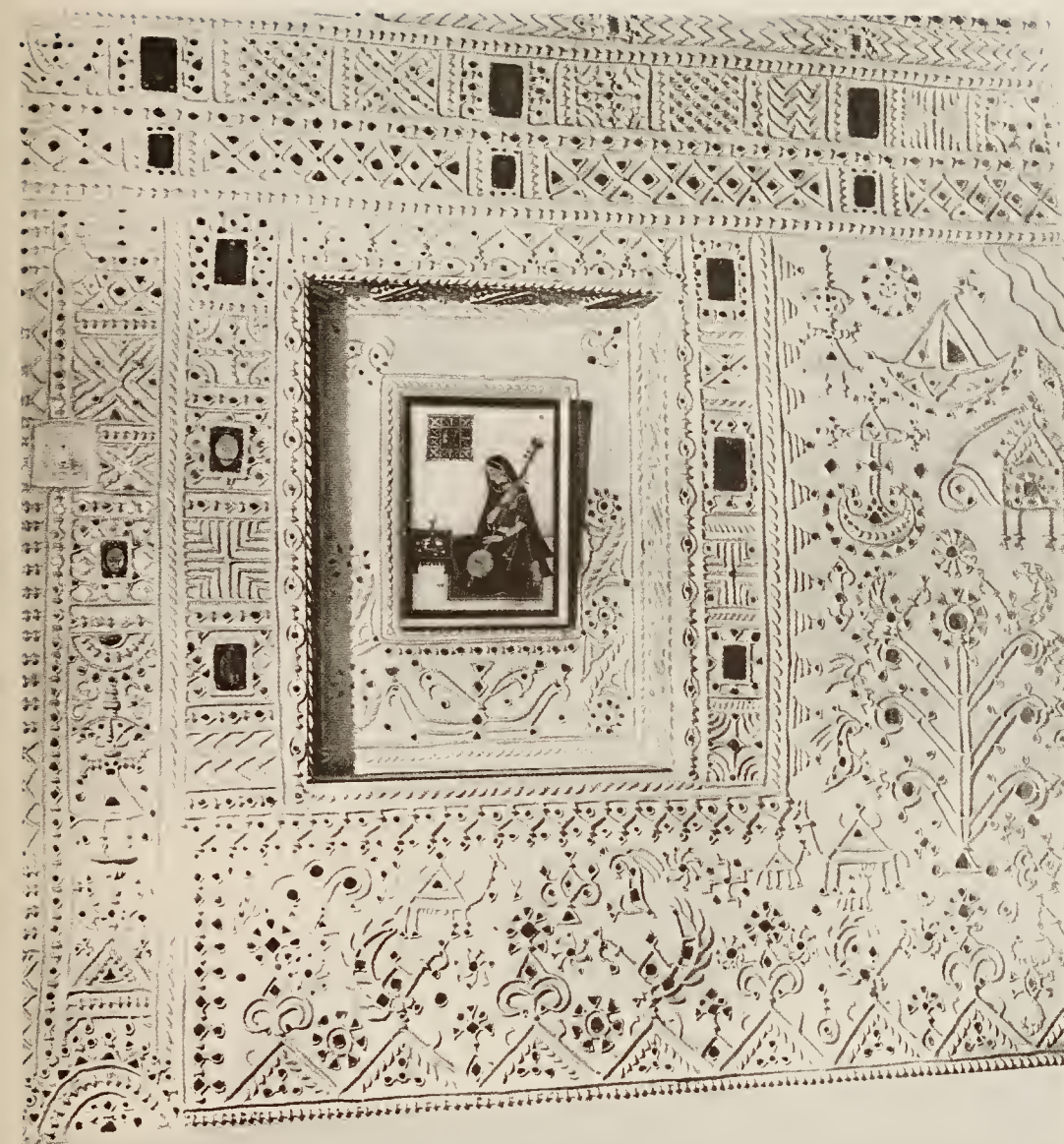




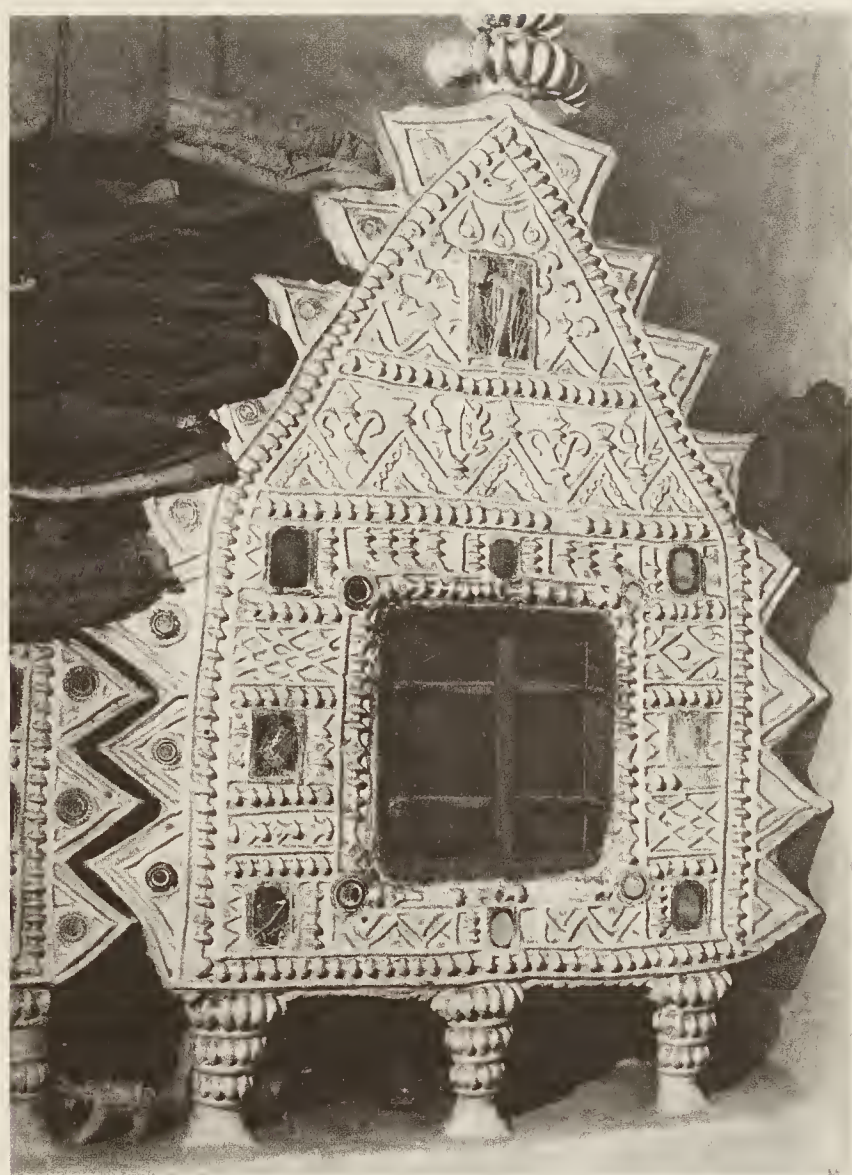








**204** Clay wall decoration on a Bhunga house.  
Kutch, Gujarat.



**205** Clay wall decoration on the house  
of Ramsinhji Rathod. Rabari house, Bhuj Kutch,  
Gujarat.

**206** Damachia, alcove for the storage of possessions.  
Clay and plaster decoration. Kutch, Gujarat.

Following pages:

**207/208** Bhil wall paintings. Pithora,  
Gujarat.

**209** Tiger. Bhil wall painting. Pithora,  
Gujarat.

**210** Horses. Bhil wall painting. Pithora,  
Gujarat.













211 Chakalo embroidery displaying Ganesha motif.  
Bhuj, Kutch, Gujarat.

212 Embroidery with appliqué work.  
Saurashtra, Gujarat.

213 Embroidered wall-hanging. Saurashtra, Gujarat.













214 Detail of a temple cloth. Gujarat.



215 Shiva's family.  
Folk painting of the Saurashtra School. Gujarat,  
18th century, 15x11 cm.

216 Ganesha.  
Folk painting of the Saurashtra School. Gujarat,  
18th century, 16x11 cm.





**217** Buddha, the planet Mercury.  
Folk painting of the Saurashtra School. Gujarat,  
19th century, 20 x 13 cm.



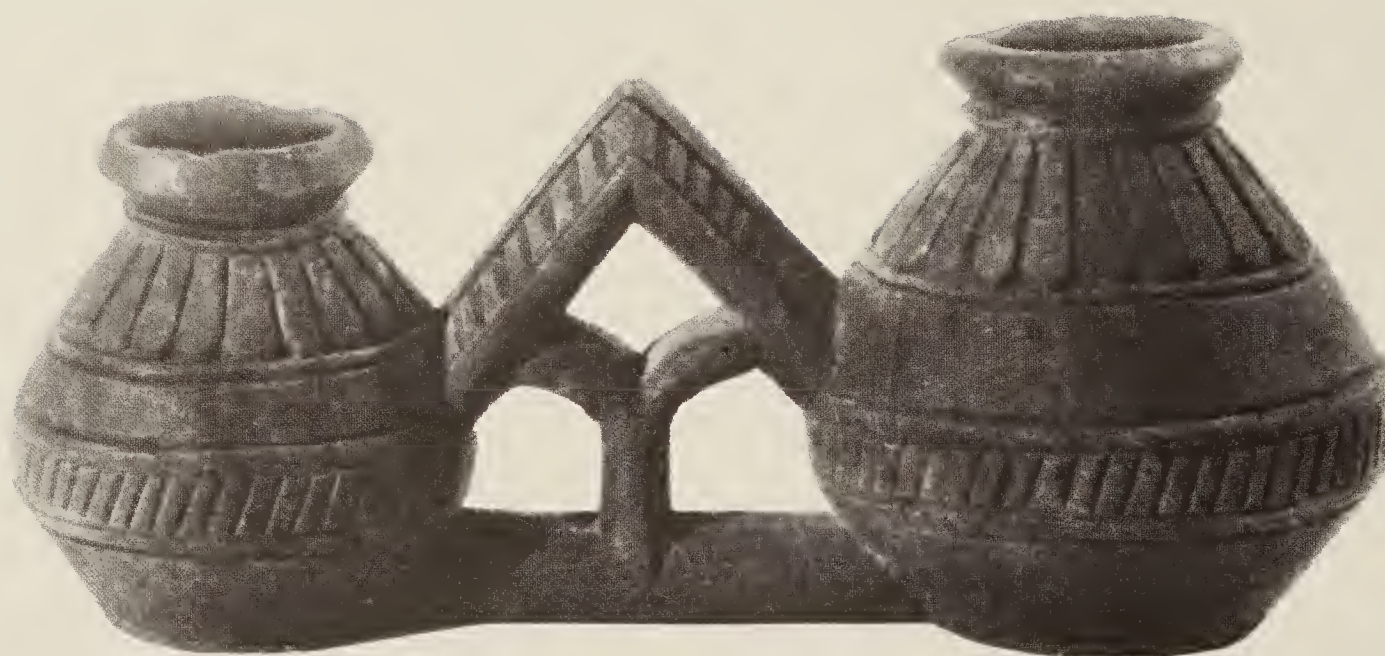
**218** The river goddess Ganga, mounted on Makara.  
Folk painting. Gujarat (?), 19.5 x 16 cm.





**219** Durga mounted on a tiger.  
Preliminary sketch (for a carving?). Gujarat,  
18th century, 15 x 19 cm.





**220** Double vessel.  
Wood. Gujarat.

**221** Millstone with wood mount.  
Bakharla village, Gujarat,  
2nd half of the 19th century.

**222** Decorative wood carving.  
Manvi, Kutch, Gujarat.



Following pages:

**223** Wood façade, Swaminarayana  
Temple, inner courtyard. Ahmedabad,  
Gujarat, 19th century.

**224** Carved front  
of wooden cupboard. Gujarat,  
19th century, 150 x 135 cm.















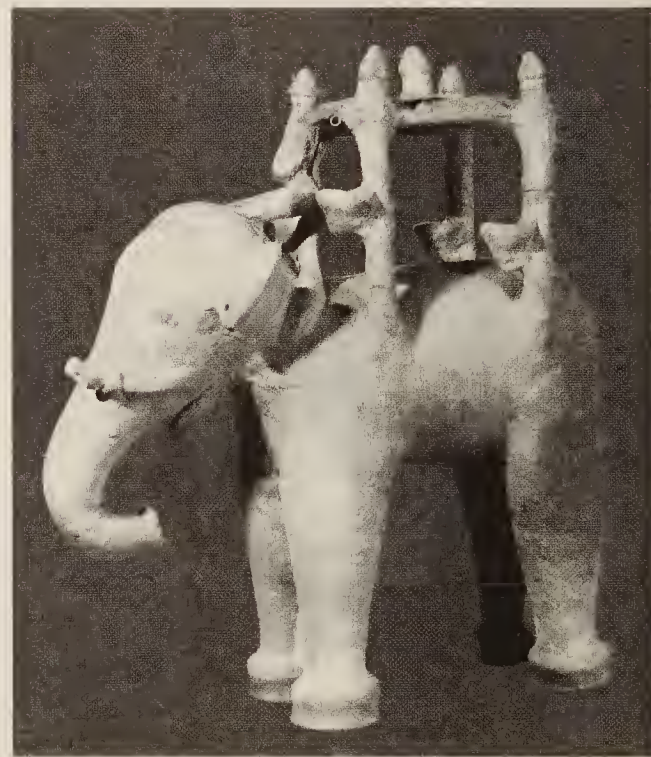


**225** Colossal figure of elephant and rider.  
Jain wood carving, 19th century, 170x 100 cm.

**226** Elephant supporting oil lamp reservoirs.  
White clay. Kutch, Gujarat, 36x32 cm.

**227** Female figure (detail).  
Wood carving. Gujarat, overall height 36 cm.

**228** Mother and child.  
Wood carving, Swaminarayana Temple.  
Ahmedabad, Gujarat, 2nd half of 19th century,  
height 130 cm.











**229** Wheeled horse. Bronze.  
Gujarat, 16th century (?), height 14 cm.

**230** Cloth puppets. Gujarat, height 50 and 42 cm.



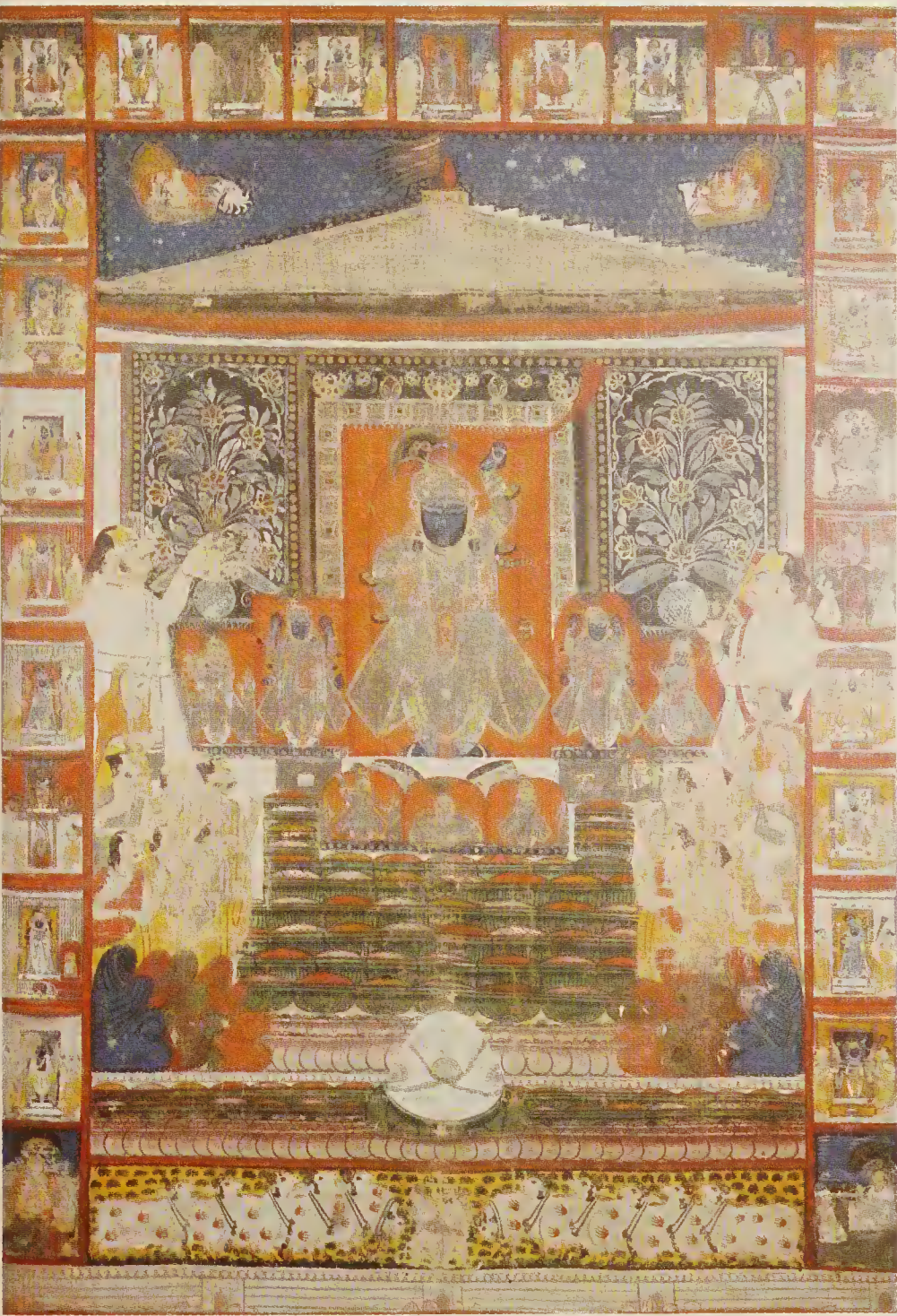








233 Nathdwara painting on cloth.  
Pichwai, Rajasthan, 98x75 cm.



234 Rider mounted on an elephant composed of girls' figures. Glass painting. Rajasthan, 22 x 14 cm.







**235** Durga on a tiger engaged in combat with the buffalo demon. Alabaster sculpture. Jaipur, Rajasthan, 18th/19th century, height 33 cm.

**236** Rider and snakes. Alabaster stele. Rajasthan.









**237** Krishna  
with his beloved, Radha.  
Glass painting. Rajasthan, 35 x 25 cm.

**238** Camel riders.  
Horn sculpture. Rajasthan.













**239** Horse.  
Wood and cloth. Rajasthan, height 34 cm.

**240** Female figure.  
Wood carving. Rajasthan, height 52 cm.





- 241 Two-headed zoomorphic vessel.  
Brass. Rajasthan, early 19th century, 8 x 14 cm.
- 242 Equestrian figure.  
Brass. Rajasthan, 16th century (?), 20 x 17 cm.
- 243 Cart. Clay. Haryana, height 12 cm.









244 Shiva and family. Terracotta, Rajasthan.

245 Sanjhi Devi.  
Wall decoration in clay, paper, shells etc.  
Haryana.













**246** Shiva and his wife Parvati.  
Brass. Punjab, 12th century (?), height 17 cm.

**247** Durga mounted on a tiger.  
Stone relief. Kangra, Himachal Pradesh,  
height 17 cm.







ing the streets of the smaller towns, while local potentates and the more well-to-do merchants adorned the walls round their courtyards of their small palaces and houses with ornamental carvings. Such houses also contained wood shrines carved in imitation of temple façades and used for purposes of private worship.

To cite only one example, Baroda Museum possesses a wooden structure of this kind, known as a *mandapa*, which is said to have come from the house of a wealthy Jain merchant. The *mandapa*, which is over seven metres long, almost four metres wide and about three and a half metres high, is covered with innumerable figurative and decorative carvings, some in the round and some in low relief.<sup>59</sup> Such a masterpiece of religious art can hardly be representative of folk art. Yet in his paper on the subject, H. Goetz points out that this type of wood carving and, indeed, later Indian art as a whole, has been subsumed by some authors under the heading folk art and dismissed as decadent. It seems to us necessary to take issue with the above claim and to state in no uncertain terms that later Indian art as a whole cannot simply be defined as folk art, nor can it be regarded as decadent. It is not till the colonial period, and then only in the field of princely and orthodox religious art, that a marked decline becomes discernible. But even in this sphere, quality must be judged in accordance with historical criteria rather than by the yardstick of emotive prejudice. However it is quite impermissible to attach the label “decadent” to folk art. Indeed, every single word in the present work, the purpose of which is to establish the historical importance of the Indian folk art, is diametrically opposed to such an ab-

surdity—an absurdity, moreover, seldom perpetrated by modern writers.

However, the classification of Gujarati wood sculpture as a whole is a question of an altogether different kind. The works we have in mind are those produced in the colonial period at a time when new socio-economic structures were emerging in India. So far as art was concerned, patronage was increasingly coming to be the province of the now influential and prosperous classes of land-owners on the one hand and, on the other, of the big merchants belonging to the urban bourgeoisie. However, these men no longer patronized the artists who had previously served the ruling houses and chief centres of orthodox religion. Instead they more often had recourse to groups which had sprung from the village guilds and the traditional castes of craftsmen. The recipients of these commissions tended increasingly to settle in the vicinity of their new patrons, whether around the seats of the landowners or, as was more frequently the case, in towns of greater or lesser magnitude. That is why the influence of the folk art tradition is so strongly in evidence in the art of the colonial period.

In assessing the wood sculptures of Gujarat, a parallel may be drawn with the terracotta temples of Bengal, a subject which we shall consider at greater length in the next chapter. Though the material employed in either case is quite different, both groups have certain features in common: the works of art they comprise are executed to accord with the particular tastes of local and regional communities, whether rural or urban, and it is in the context of this same craft tradition that its practitioners were reared and received their training. The carved wooden house façades of Gujarat and the terracotta temples of Bengal occur within what are territorially circumscribed regions of India, and in this sense constitute a form of pro-

vincial folk art that is unmistakably local in character. Though varying in style and material, the two groups, which are widely distributed within their own areas, reveal a common purport. Both are as remote from archaic tribal art as they are from the classical art of the subcontinent. In so far as there is any link with classical art, this lies in the field of religious subjects as represented by the Jain and the Hindu pictorial traditions in Gujarat and Bengal respectively. Even this thematic continuity is related to local artistic developments.

The folk art of the colonial period in Gujarat, as we have already seen in Maharashtra, also comprised furniture and small household items adapted to cultivated taste and unashamed of their rustic origins. These, the forerunners of the mass-produced articles of today, were manufactured by indigenous artisans in a wide variety of materials. Amongst these we might cite small metal sculptures intended for use in urban homes, such as nut cutters in figurative form, ink pots, and locks; also mortars made of or clad in wood, tables, chairs, chests, and vessels, many of them artistically contrived and richly decorated.

If we now turn to Gujarat's northern neighbour, Rajasthan, we shall find that here, too, the more recent folk art of the district reveals local characteristics that are worthy of particular mention. On the other hand, we shall do little more than touch on those artefacts of the same period which have already been discussed in connection with Gujarat. No other province in this part of India has had so turbulent a history as Rajasthan, at any rate during the period beginning in about 1000 A.D. and lasting until well into the colonial period. It was the scene of violent confrontations with the Islamic conquerors who were not able to assert their supremacy as they had succeeded in doing in the neighbouring provinces.

[59] GOETZ, H., “A Monument of Old Gujarati Wood Sculpture”, in: *Baroda Museum Bulletin*, 1948/49, VI, 1/2, pp. 1–30.



Hence, in northern India, the art of Rajasthan and the relatively inaccessible Pahari tracts represented, at the time of the Islamic invasion, a tendency which was markedly Hindu in the religious sphere as well as being militantly nationalist, a tendency that is at its most evident in the schools of miniature painting. The major and minor dynasties of the warlike Rajput rulers not only defended this region, but also afforded a place of refuge to victims of persecution from other parts of India. Many of these rulers, however, were prepared to co-operate and, indeed, formed family ties with their Islamic neighbours. Somewhat later they were to entertain similar relations with the British during the period of colonial rule, when the Rajputs continued to remain comparatively independent. Today, however, their lands have been integrated into the territory of the Indian Republic. In 1976 O. P. Joshi published his *Painted Folklore and Folklore Painters of India*, a study that is specifically devoted to the folk art painting of Rajasthan. He examines, from the sociological and aesthetic viewpoint, two traditional schools of painting, the *par*-painters who, elsewhere in India, are also known as *pat*-painters, and the *pichwai*-painters. But whereas the *par*-painters produce their pictures for wandering storytellers who, like the *chitrakathis* of Maharashtra, provide nightly entertainment for village audiences, the *pichwai*-painters serve the needs of a religious institution. Their function is to illustrate the Krishna legend, notably as handed down in the tradition of the Krishna Shrine at Nathdwara. After the destruction of the Mathura temples by the Islamic zealot and Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb, the adherents of Krishna fled from Uttar Pradesh and found refuge in Nathdwara north of Udaipur in the State of Mewar in Rajasthan. Like the artists who live in the purlieus

of the Jagannath Temple at Puri in Orissa or of the Kaligath Temple at Calcutta in Bengal, these *Pichwais*, also known as Nathdwara painters, having familiarized themselves with the characteristics of the local cult and, in particular, with the images of its gods, paint pictures (for the most part cheap replicas of the typical Krishna image)

to supply the demand of pilgrims and of regular visitors to the shrine.<sup>60</sup>

*Par* and *pichwai*-painters are professional artists who are paid for their work and are obliged to adhere to a set repertory. However, as O. P. Joshi has shown, the traditional obligation to repeat the same themes over and over again is by no means as inflex-



249 Par-painting.  
Note the wealth of individual detail.  
Contemporary work, Rajasthan.



ible as would at first appear. For the artist is bound to a tradition of this kind only by his dependence on his various types of customer, whether these be laymen or religious institutions. That tradition begins to change, however, as soon as the corresponding social structures either themselves change or cease to exist. Today the chief customers of these two groups of traditional folk art painters are local collectors and, in particular, foreign tourists. The new circumstances thus created have entailed a process of adaptation. Having identified areas of unsatisfied demand, the painters supply collectors of Indian miniatures with skillful copies of works emanating from the most diverse schools of painting. From this it is evident not only that changes may take place in thematic content, but also that stylistic criteria may be arbitrarily altered. Supply and demand determine the choice of picture and the nature of its composition. The artist or craftsman adapts himself to the needs of his customers, a circumstance that is particularly apparent today and attributable to the rapid changes in social and economic circumstances. It is quite possible that similar processes took place, if far more slowly and hence in much less obvious fashion, in earlier times. In 1976, the number of *par*-painters domiciled in the Bhilwara district of Rajasthan amounted to no more than sixteen, as opposed to between a hundred and fifty and two hundred in the case of the *pichwai*-painters.

The *par*-painters produce long picture scrolls, one of which, described in detail by Joshi, is nearly twelve metres long and two metres wide. The classic compositions consist of detailed illustrations of stories from two popular epics, the *Devnarayankipar* and the *Pabujikipar*. Today other cycles are

depicted—for example themes from the *Ramayana* and from the life of Krishna. Certain characteristics of these picture scrolls are especially typical of more recent folk art and therefore merit a more detailed description. The scrolls are so long that they cannot be assimilated at one glance. The figures vary in size, as in the Ahmedabad temple hangings of the mother-goddess, and here too the largest figure is depicted more or less in the middle of the scroll. The composition and arrangement of the individual scenes determines whether they are painted horizontally or vertically, while each is separated from the next by a border of decorative geometrical designs. Popular Hindu deities—Ganesha, for instance, or Krishna—may be introduced into a narrative that is essentially secular and epic, even where they are of no significance to the context. Elephants and horses play a major role. Most are individual in form and are differentiated by their size, colour and ornamentation as well as by the way they are placed in the composition.

Auxiliary figures, snakes and birds, trees and flowers, are also incorporated without apparent regard for the content. Faces are for the most part depicted in profile, and rows of figures are much favoured. The range of colours is small, containing only a few basic shades in which red predominates, while black is used for outline, orange for the skin, grey for buildings, and green for plants and again, in combination with red, for clothing. Finally, yellow serves to enhance decorative elements.

The *par*-painters sell their scrolls to the patron who commissioned them, and he in turn passes them on to itinerant showmen, known as Bhopas. The latter dress up in costume and, with the help of music, singing and dancing, interpret the pictures to village audiences. The Bhopas are not permitted to sell their picture scrolls. To do so would be

regarded as sacrilege for, so long as the pictures are used by the performers, they are considered to be the abode or seat of the deity concerned. However, when a picture scroll becomes old and the paintings have faded, the whole is consigned to the sacred waters of Lake Pushkar. The destruction of cult images manufactured for specific ceremonial occasions may also be observed elsewhere in India. Thus in Bengal, images of Durga, made of perishable materials, are produced in large quantities for the annual Durga puja when they are borne in ceremonial procession to the Ganges and cast into its waters. The same fate awaits the large statues of Ganesha in Bombay which, after their brief ceremonial appearance, end up in the sea.

Being members of sub-groups of the Brahmanic castes, the *par* and *pichwai*-painters occupy a relatively high social position. Some of the Nathdwara painters are said to have been women and it would appear to be they who were particularly adept at producing miniature paintings. The Nathdwara painters were, and still remain, professionals, inordinately proud of their skills and, in particular, of their artistic mastery—which is admittedly neither very creative nor particularly original—of each particular style. They do not regard themselves in any way as folk artists upon whom, indeed, they tend to look down, since in their eyes folk art is technically inferior and its artists unprofessional. From our viewpoint, such judgments and self-assessments, though undoubtedly of considerable interest, cannot be regarded as valid in any objective sense. It may be supposed that the artisans of the Harappan period took a similar pride in their profession and despised the amateur artist of those days, despite the fact that they themselves formed part of the earlier tradition of non-professional communal artistic production. Considered

[60] SKELTON, P., *Rajasthani Temple Hangings of the Krishna Cult*, New York, 1973 (Catalogue).



objectively, therefore, the art of the Nathdwara painters may justifiably be described as folk art, even though professional and practical considerations may have dictated its temporary subservience to the requirements of wealthy patrons. The fact that it was born of the village crafts, was traditionally associated with village rather than court art, and was originally intended to cater for the needs of pilgrims, has inevitably influenced the style, composition and subject matter of the work it comprises.

At this point we might turn to an important group of stone sculptures, executed for the most part in white marble by artists living in Jaipur. These works, which consist of statues of deities belonging to both the Hindu and the Jain pantheons, were produced by professional craftsmen during the early colonial period for the Indian market and, subsequently, also for the export trade. Here, then, we have an instance of the manufacture and sale of religious statues made of durable material. These marble figures from Jaipur have never been accounted part of India's classical artistic tradition, nor have they ever been commissioned either by courts or by religious institutions. While some of the pieces retain their natural colour, the best are carved in fine white marble which is then very delicately painted and gilded. To claim that this is folk art would be to presuppose what it does not possess, namely naïveté of expression and individual originality. On the other hand, these stone sculptures are devoid of the schematism typical of modern industrialized art products. The individuality which distinguishes each piece from its fellows derives from the craft tradition. No longer is the artist faced with the challenge presented by the exigencies of a patron. The anonymity of the market for which the sculptures are produced virtually eliminates the element which induces true originality. To this it might be

objected that the Nathdwara painters also catered for an anonymous market, namely the pilgrim trade. As compared with the Jaipur sculptors, however, they were in far closer contact with their customers as a whole. For there still existed a measure of agreement between the traditional artistic tastes of both producers and consumers, as is discernible, not only in the popular treatment of the Nathdwara paintings, but also in their style and content. On the other hand the very subject-matter of the statues produced by the Jaipur sculptors betrays the gulf that exists between the latter and their customers, a gulf unbridged by a consensus based on a shared tradition. Indeed, their use of stone, a relatively expensive material, also places their products beyond the means of large numbers of potential Indian purchasers.

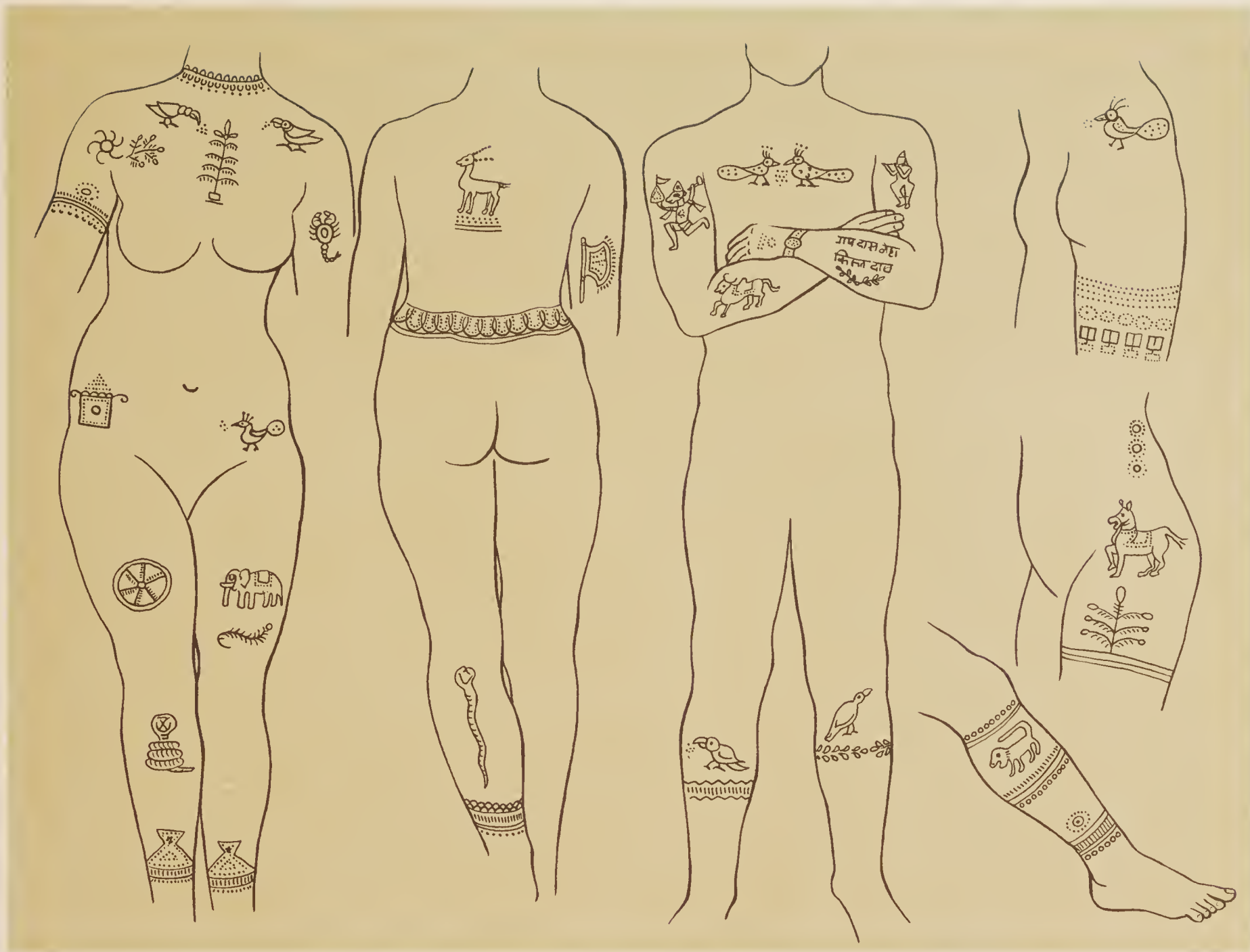
If all these factors be taken into consideration, it will be found that the Jaipur stone sculptures do not lend themselves to classification as folk art. Nor do they have any part in the current development of Indian folk art, but rather herald the emergence of a new artistic trend. What we have here is not yet the art of the individual artist, nor is it the art of the traditional Indian artisan. The above observation may help to explain why it is that no one, be he a collector of Indian classical art or a member of the new band of folk art lovers, concerns himself with the above-named Jaipur sculptures. A search for illustrations of such works in the relevant publications would prove fruitless. Perhaps this is to some extent attributable to the fear that these objects may be dismissed as *kitsch*, as would-be works of art without function or traditions. However, such epithets should be applied with some reserve, for many of the Jaipur products are of outstanding quality. If we have discussed this question at some length, it is because we cannot but endorse, in the context of Indian

cultural development, any attempt by Indian artists to adapt themselves to changing economic and social conditions, as indeed they have been endeavouring to do ever since the colonial period. The involuntary processes—comprehensible only in terms of the history of Indian civilization—can no more be ignored than conscious attempts to cope with the new circumstances arising out of greater individual freedom in the field of art. The five thousand or so craftsmen of Jaipur who, like the Nathdwara painters, are Adi-Goud Brahmins, should not be classed as modern free-lance artists. For they are still subject to the constraints of a caste-related craft whose skills have been handed down from one generation to the next so that, in this respect, these men represent a relic of the past. Modern India, in which the old rubs shoulders with the new, can still offer them a reasonable livelihood. Hence they cannot simply be ignored when it comes to a discussion of art, for they can now boast a tradition that goes back several centuries. The time is ripe for a special study duly acknowledging the merits of these stone sculptures of the Jaipur School, sculptures now so widely disseminated that examples may be found in the storerooms of most European collections.

A consideration of the ancient traditions of body painting and tattooing, which we have already encountered in central India, takes us back to the early origins of Indian folk art. In Rajasthan the tattooing of the body or some part of the body is still practised among the semi-nomadic groups of tribal origin, now organized into professional castes, such as the Gadia Lohars (blacksmiths), the Banjaras and Nath Jogis.<sup>61</sup> Nor

[61] JOSHI, O. P., *Tattooing and Tattooers: A Socio-cultural Analysis*. International Committee on Urgent Anthropological and Ethnological Research. Institut für Völkerkunde, Vienna, 18, 1976.





is tattooing confined to the women. For instance, Joshi tells of an occasion when the Nath Jogis held a meeting of their caste to discuss the case of a runaway girl. It was hoped that the tattoo mark on the girl's forehead would enable her to be traced. Such marks might represent the sun, for example, or the moon. When reading Indian or Gypsy folk tales, we repeatedly come

upon passages in which the hero or heroine is identified by the sun, moon or stars on his or her forehead or breast. These are usually interpreted as betokening the beauty of the person concerned, but taken in context they may also refer to the existence of actual tattoo marks. The meaning of individual pictographs, whether figurative or abstract and geometrical, is not as a rule immediately

apparent. In archaic rock paintings we have already encountered some of these symbols and images, a form of pictorial shorthand which recurs later on in the stamp seals of the Harappan period and, at a still later date, in Indian coins. Yet any attempt to interpret the content of such recurring forms should be undertaken only with the utmost caution. Only in the case of certain tattoo

**250** Tattoo designs for women in Gadia Lohar, Nath Jogi and Banjara, Rajasthan. Nath-Jogi man with tattoo marks. Rajasthan.

Following pages:

**251/252** Tattooing on arms, hands, legs and feet. Saurashtra, Gujarat.











marks currently in use is it sometimes possible to learn the meaning they are intended to convey. From this it transpires that the image by no means always tallies with the content. In the course of time old conventions may undergo a change of meaning that is not always evident from the image alone. A special kind of bodily embellishment, the painting of the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet, is largely but not exclusively confined to Rajasthan. This form of self-adornment is known as *menhadi*, after the plant from the leaves of which the red dye is extracted for the purpose. Today the art is also practised by middle class townswomen who, on festive occasions, paint auspicious symbols on their fingers and the palms of their hands.

Here we have another example of the adoption by modern Indian society of an ancient popular tradition. The original intention, which was to ward off evil, has doubtless been largely lost from view. Rather, the chief object today is to achieve a decorative effect that can be varied at will. The only persons with sufficient leisure to indulge in this art form are women of high social standing. The fact remains, however, that these *menhadi* paintings are the work of amateurs, many of whom possess great skill and sensitivity, while the motifs employed are frequently of ancient provenance. Hence they may be regarded as a minor branch of domestic folk art, or at any rate as an art related to the vernacular tradition.<sup>62</sup> In Rajasthan, as almost everywhere else in India, the women follow the tradition of ceremonial floor-painting, here known as *mandana*.

In modern times Rajasthan continued to be a centre of the decorative arts, the splendour of which reached a peak under the patronage of the Rajput princes. Gold and precious stones, ivory inlay and superb enamels were used to embellish weapons, jewellery

and the furnishings of the Rajput palaces. The outstanding quality of Rajasthani craftsmanship was appreciated, not only by the Islamic rivals of the Rajputs, but also, at a later date, by the British rulers of India. In the eyes of many observers, traditional folk art pales beside the richness of the artefacts produced for the court. But this situation is reversed further to the north, in the Pahari tracts which were also ruled by Rajput dynasties.

The Pahari tracts, now known as Himachal Pradesh, are proving to be a veritable treasure-house of Indian folk art. The district's miniature paintings and needlework, such as the embroidered cloths known as *chambharumals*, have long attracted the attention of art lovers. However, the full extent to which other forms of amateur and professional folk art, in the shape of wall and floor painting, textile manufacture and wood-carving, have continued to survive has, until quite recently, been known only to a few specialists.<sup>63</sup>

This hill country was even further removed from the actual centres of power of India's Islamic and British conquerors than were Gujarat and Rajasthan. Hence many of the erstwhile inhabitants of the much fought-over north Indian plains, which later became subject, first to Islamic and then to British rule, fled to the Pahari tracts which thus afforded a place of refuge, not only to the people themselves, but also to their cultural traditions. Accordingly, the area might be described as a melting pot of aboriginal and north Indian folklore and of the popular representational arts in particular. In the villages and small towns we may rediscover in wall-paintings the same stylistic features and principles of composition already encountered in the Saora and Warli paintings and the wall paintings of Saurashtra and Kutch. This is an aspect we shall again consider with reference to north

Bihar. In the northern hill country as elsewhere it is to the women, in particular, that we owe the preservation of what is an age-old Indian cultural heritage. For it was they, with their gift for artistic expression, who, over the millennia and despite changing social circumstances, succeeded in perpetuating many of the traditional images by reproducing them over and over again, thus forging a chain of which the intermediate links must perforce remain undocumented. Nowadays this is an art confined to household festivals and celebrations, but such has by no means always been the case. It is evident that, in the more recent culture of the Hindu villages and towns, the ancient tribal traditions are as yet by no means extinct or even moribund when regard is had to the basic role played by art in social life, or to the innumerable details found in formal representation. Indeed, in the special circumstances created by what is a more or less peripheral and isolated location, that fundamental archaic element in Indian art which, at the very outset, we designated as folk art, has given evidence of quite astonishing powers of survival.

Many of the Pahari wall paintings are characterized by highly schematized, house-like figures which have been interpreted as representations of a female deity. Precursors of, if not parallels to, this Pahari goddess are discernible, not only in the gable-fronted houses of the Saora pictographs, but also—and this rather more clearly—in the corn goddess of the Warli painters and in similarly schematized representations of deities in Gujarat. Here, the corres-

[62] BHANAWAT, M., *Menhadi Rang Rachi. Folkloric Study of Colourful Myrtle*, Udaipur, 1976.

[63] HANDA, O. C., *Pahāri Folk Art*, Bombay, 1975, is particularly informative.

[64] HANDA, O. C., *Pahāri Folk Art*, Bombay, 1975, fig. 45.



pondence is not only formal, but is also inherent in the abstract ideas suggested by the subject-matter, in as much as the goddess may be interpreted as a house, or rather as its symbolic custodian and protectress. Within this goddess figure or schematic rectangle, other figures are portrayed either singly or in groups along with what appear to be symbolic pictographs intended to elucidate the content of the whole. The use of pictorial elements to fill the interior of the house or of the goddess's body can hardly be regarded as a purely fortuitous

parallel and is, indeed, so clearly consistent with Saora and Warli practice as to provide incontrovertible evidence of a continuity transcending both time and region. The homogeneity of the composition is further emphasized by the addition of a second, rectangular border surrounding the whole, as it were a frame conceived as a house and enclosing the entire scene, including the lesser houses and the house-like goddess. In symbology the simple gable-fronted house is interpreted as a temple.<sup>64</sup> The concept of the temple as the house of god is

not exclusive to India. However, in Pahari art it is also related to another, and this time typically Indian, concept of the womb as a cave or hollow space, an aspect already touched on earlier in this chapter in connection with the hollow figurines of the Harappan period.

In these Pahari paintings we may also discern another characteristic of Indian imagery to which allusion has already been made, namely the portable nature of the houses depicted which, like litters, sedan-chairs and Indian palanquins or *palkis*, can be borne by porters from place to place. Here again, certain features of tribal custom, such as the use of ceremonial *palkis* by the Santals, combine with those of Hindu religious practice—for instance the temple cars, to which more than one allusion has already been made, or indeed the great stone temple mounted on stone wheels—to form a popular tradition that is all-embracing and may still be discerned in the wall paintings of the Pahari women. Since some of the houses are depicted, not with pitched, but with rounded roofs, there might, perhaps, be some justification for the view that the commemorative steles and *sati* stones found in central and north-west India were originally conceived as symbolic houses, the dwelling places of deceased heroes and of widows who had elected to die on their husbands' funeral pyres.

Many of these old traditions manifest themselves in the rites that attend wedding ceremonies, for example the use of the litter by the Santals and the ride of the bridegroom to his bride. The actual wedding takes place after the removal from one house to the other and the erection of a *vedi* or wooden nuptial altar which is identical in appearance to the houses with pitched roofs depicted in the paintings. Birds, usually peacocks, perch upon the angles and the ridges. In Saora pictographs the peacock



253 Palm paintings.  
Gujarat and Rajasthan.





obviously fulfils the function of sentry and custodian.<sup>65</sup> Inside the house, the walls of the nuptial chamber are adorned with paintings in which the *vedi* is again depicted. In addition there are, on occasion, small wood carvings representing peacocks and nuptial houses.

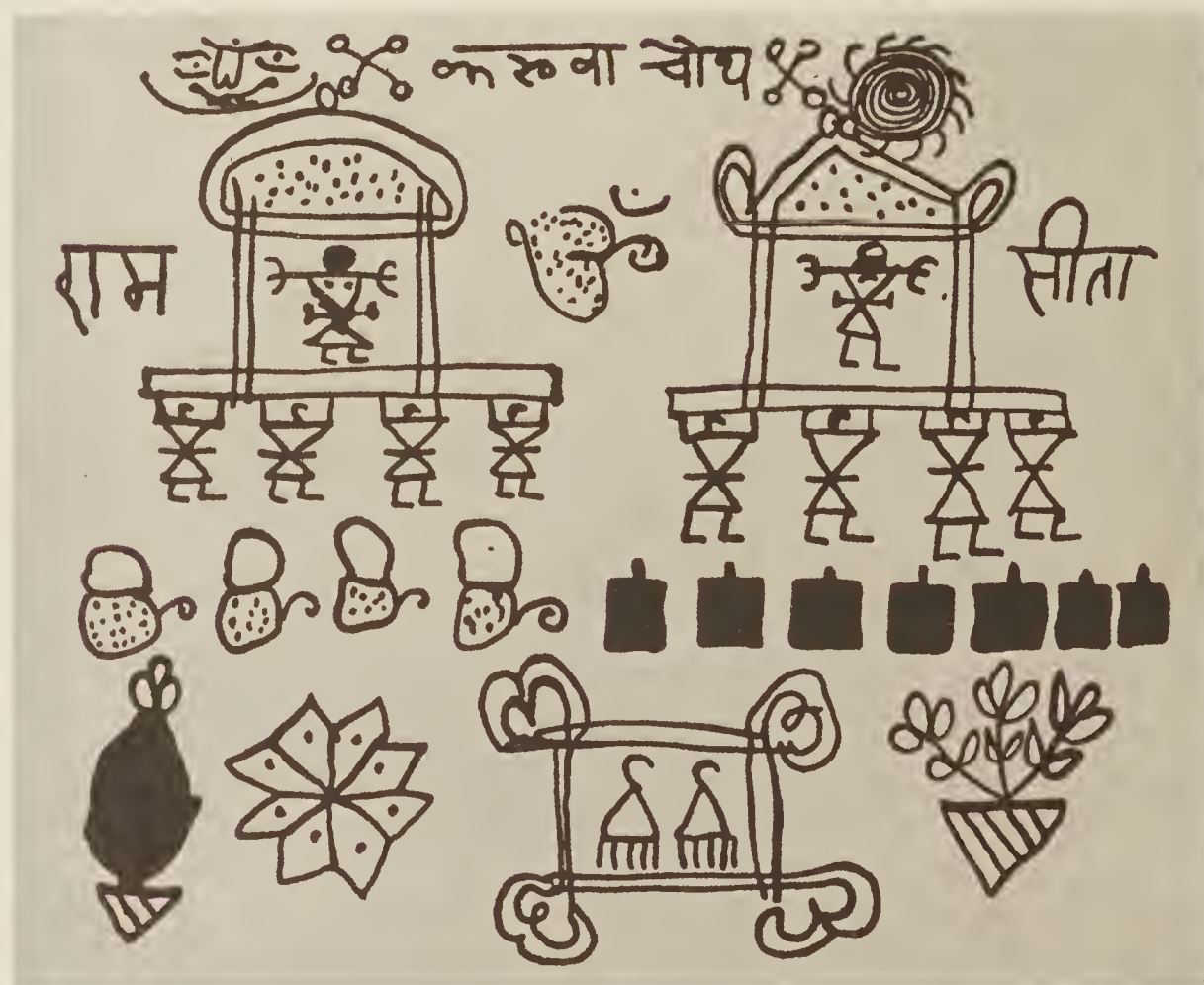
The peacock as a symbol of virility is often accompanied by the parrot symbolizing love and passion. In classical Indian mythology these birds are associated with the war god Karttikeya and the god of love Kammadeva, as their *vahanas*, their seats or mounts. In these paintings, the fish symbolizes the female genitalia. While such interpretations are not without interest, they should not be assumed to be universally applicable. Of greater significance is the appearance in the form of pictographs of symbolically pregnant animals which, indeed, figure prominently in a pictorial vocabulary

that is common to Indian art in all periods and regions. Along with other early pictographs, such as the footprint and the pitcher, they recur persistently in the present-day Indian repertory, whether in domestic floor decoration or in pictures adorning nuptial and other forms of greeting cards which, though sometimes mass-produced, are often still made and delivered by hand.

The goddess Hoi, whom we have already encountered in geometrical and abstract guise, is worthy of a few additional comments. She does not form part of the familiar Hindu pantheon, nor will it be possible to find her name in a reference book such as John Dowson's *Dictionary of Hindu Mythology*. That she inspires fear and must be propitiated in order to secure her good will and protection is proof enough of her

great antiquity and direct descent from the early Indian mother-goddess. Oral tradition has it that at one time human sacrifices were regularly offered up to the goddess Hoi and from the same tradition we learn of the transition to less bloodthirsty rites. The story goes that a youth, whom it was intended to sacrifice to the goddess, brought sweetmeats with him in his pocket and that the goddess, having partaken thereof, declared herself satisfied with these offerings and willing thenceforward to eschew human flesh. The "domestication" of what had once been a very cruel and savage deity is

[65] Cf. HANDA, O. C., *Pahāri Folk Art*, Bombay, 1975, Fig. 22 and Plates 35 and 36, and ELWIN, V., *The Tribal Art of Middle India*, London, 1951, Fig. 213.



254 Hoi astami.  
Painting executed by Pahari women.  
Kangra, Himachal Pradesh.

255 Karwa-Chauth drawing, executed  
by Pahari women. Kangra, Himachal Pradesh.





here related with touching naïveté. But in the pictorial representations of her the ancient fears still linger on. Hoi has to be propitiated over and over again. On Hoi Astami, her feast day, the welfare of the sons of the family is invoked. The images and pictographs within the outline of her body reflect, not only the legends relating to her “domestication”, but also the gifts that are

offered up to the goddess. It is not customary for her icon to be allotted a permanent site; rather it is movable and, on feast-days, may often be carried in procession. The goddess Lakshmi figures very prominently in the calendar of feasts in the Pahari tracts. She made her entry into the Hindu pantheon as the bride of Vishnu. Revered as Shri (mistress) and goddess of domestic

bliss, she, too, is a descendant or, as it were, a reincarnation of the archaic rural mother-goddess. On the occasion of the Festival of Divali a special place is allotted to her inside the house. To ensure that the goddess does not pass a house by, a trail of footprints is painted on the ground outside with a view to attracting her attention and guiding her indoors. Within, her presence is indicated,

256 Wall painting  
executed by women of Kothi village,  
Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh.



not so much by figurative personifications as by an arrangement of large numbers of auspicious emblems.

In the same region, too, the floor and wall paintings are executed exclusively by women. The floors are given a coating of cow dung which is then beaten flat, and painting begins while it is still damp. The paint, consisting of earth colours and rice paste mixed with dyes, is, as it were, dribbled onto the surface with the fingers closely pressed together. This process is known locally as *haugaiyan*, while other terms such as *dehar*, *likhnu* and *chauk* would seem rather to apply to specific forms of the art of floor painting. A characteristic peculiar to the locality is the unforced rhythm and verve of this type of painting, in somewhat striking contrast to the often rigid forms of the Bengali *alponas* and the decorative *rangoli* paintings of Maharashtra, in which the stylization is even more extreme. The Pahari women do not appear to plan their compositions, nor do they make a preliminary drawing. Such local differences notwithstanding, it need hardly be said that all these floor paintings form part of a uniform tradition in which use is made of the simplest pictographs. Later these were to assume a more complex guise reminiscent of the esoteric priestly *yantras* of the Tantric cults. Today collections of such signs are appearing in pattern books, thereby yet further facilitating inter-regional exchanges. On the whole this form of compilation is to be regretted, in that it tends to obliterate local idiosyncracies without, however, shaking our conviction that a general correspondence has long since been established on the basis of the historical material, cases in point being the parallels with rock paintings, with the decorations on archaic vessels and with the seals of the Harappan period, to name only a few of the earliest examples.

At this juncture mention should also be

made of a somewhat more complex if characteristic pictograph known as a *chauki* or *chauk*. Freely translated, *chauki* means platform or rectangle. In the earliest representations we find structures of this kind, sometimes in the form of a simple rectangle, but more frequently in that of a kind of altar. In the latter case the internal space may be filled with, for example, diagonal lines, while external embellishment may consist of decorative motifs or a framework of symbols. The *chauk* or *chauki* theme appears with especial frequency in the form of a tattoo mark, and hence it seems reasonable to suppose that such pictographs were transmitted from one place to another in the form of body ornaments, a theory that would explain their dissemination throughout the subcontinent.

Finally, in considering the rich store of Pahari folk art, we should briefly revert to textiles, wood carvings and small metal sculptures, all of which, though mainly produced by local professional craftsmen, still remain intimately linked with the popular tradition. Textiles continue to be hand-made, a notable example being the embroidered cloths or *chamba rumals*. These embroideries have recourse to the same subject matter as the Pahari miniatures, namely, the cult of Krishna which is very widespread in this region. Thus one of the most popular themes is that of Krishna, dancing and playing his flute and surrounded by a ring of milkmaids, in other words, a circular composition in the true sense of the term. Here a comparison may also be drawn with the *phulkari* silk hangings of the Punjab. The *chamba rumals*, roughly square in shape, are made of muslin or satin, the figurative designs being embroidered on them in silk thread.

Like the *chamba rumals*, the *phulkari* embroideries were executed by women and, though not perhaps until a later date, also

by professional craftsmen. Hand-woven, and by no means always new, silk fabric is covered with closely stitched silk embroidery to produce double cloth. In many respects this work may be compared with the *sujanis* of Bihar and the *kanthas* of Bengal. In Haryana and the eastern part of the Punjab these stuffs are richly embellished with themes drawn from folklore. Here, mention should also be made of Kashmir shawls produced from the hair of the mountain goat, though these belong to a somewhat different category from the popular textiles of Himachal Pradesh and the Punjab. The embroidery displays the characteristics of the stylistic changes that have inevitably occurred in a centuries old professional craft. Such shawls have long been exported to Europe where they have come to be regarded as representative of the art of textile manufacture in India. The most characteristic motif, and one that has now been adopted in textile decoration throughout the subcontinent, is a tapering leaf, the tip of which is bent over sharply to the left in a hooklike curve resembling that of a parrot's beak. This can hardly be said to be an original Indian design, unless it be seen as belonging to the same tradition as the Indian fig or pipal leaf which, however, is broad, palmate and ribbed, as compared with the more elongated, ovate form of the Kashmir motif. In so far as there are any correspondences between the two, they might be said to lie in the pointed nature of both leaves and in the flexing of the extremities in either case.<sup>66</sup>

The wood carvings of Himachal Pradesh differ from those of Gujarat in that they are more rustic in character and closer to the

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[66] On Cashmiri shawls, see IRWIN, J., *Shawls*, London, 1955; on textiles in general, DHAMJA, J., *Indian Folk Arts and Crafts*, Delhi 1977, pp. 9 ff.





spirit of folk art. The motifs are more varied and original, the decoration is light-hearted and the execution, though naïvely uninhibited, betrays considerable expressiveness, resembling in many respects the wall paintings of the women. Here again, the framed, individual composition is much in favour and here, too, we find, enclosed in a rectangle, motifs consisting of circles and whorls, as well as sections of repeat patterns—what might be called decorative panels. In addition we might cite many

motifs with which we are already familiar—the tiger and the elephant here disposed in rows, or the animal tamer in the shape of a man holding a snake. Again and again we are reminded, not so much of the relief compositions of classical Indian art as of the pictorial repertory of the Harappan stamp seals. This is not, of course, to suggest the existence of a direct link spanning several thousand years. Nevertheless, the possibility cannot be excluded that, as in more recent times, some of the inhabitants of the river

valleys further to the south and west were, at an even earlier date, driven by invaders to seek refuge in the hill country.

Himachal Pradesh was not so immediately affected as were its neighbours, Kashmir and the Punjab, by the Islamic invasion, the influence of which, like that of the later cultural changes of the colonial period, it did not, however, entirely elude. Much the same may be said of the area's folk art upon which the impact of such events was relatively slight. Indeed, in the Pahari tracts there is an evident kinship between two-dimensional and three-dimensional art. For though the small metal sculptures may represent Hindu deities, for instance Shiva mounted on Nandi and Durga on a lion, the style is reminiscent rather of the spirit-riders than of the forms prescribed by the Brahmanic canons. In conclusion we can do no more than reiterate that Himachal Pradesh constitutes a veritable haven of Indian folk art. The region is deserving of thorough investigation and for the art lover assuredly holds many a surprise in store.

257 Looped bands.

Floor painting executed by Pahari women.

Himachal Pradesh.





- State frontier
- State frontier following watercourse
- Indian state frontiers and national borders



# Northern India

From the geographical viewpoint the art of the country of Two Rivers and of the Gangetic Basin below the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna may be said to be relatively homogeneous. In historical terms, too, it may similarly be regarded as an entity.

The art of these north Indian heartlands has been in the past, as it to some extent still is, regarded as the historic art of India, since it coincides with a period which is precisely delimited by direct contacts between these regions and the Graeco-Roman states of the Mediterranean area. The campaign that took Alexander the Great to India by way of Persia, like the diplomatic, military and economic relations entertained with Indian rulers by his successors, provides us with certain dates indispensable to Indian chronology, these in turn being supported by numerous if fragmentary accounts of the events recorded by the authors of Antiquity—events about which we should know virtually nothing, were we forced to rely solely on Indian sources. Thus, taking the fourth and third centuries B.C. as the point of departure for our calculations we may, with some measure of certitude, work our way back to the times of the founders of the Indian religions, the Buddha and Mahavira, and establish with almost complete chronological accuracy the dates of the great Indian empire of that period, the empire of the Maurya dynasty.

We also possess another source, not of In-

dian provenance but from Sri Lanka, in the shape of the chronicles known as the *Dipavamsa* and the *Mahavamsa* which provide reasonably reliable information, at any rate as regards events of an historico-religious nature prior to, during and after the Maurya period. Without such points of reference, the great abundance of Indian sources and texts, including decipherable inscriptions, though enormously interesting in themselves, could not with any degree of accuracy be arranged in chronological sequence. Even at the present time there are still some who contest the dates that have been assigned to the religious founders and the Maurya rulers. Their refusal to acknowledge the parallelism of the Mediterranean sources means that they place the most varied and idiosyncratic interpretations upon the somewhat dubious chronology found in Indian so-called historical texts. Today it is still true to say that the further removed from Alexander's time Indian history becomes, the more difficult it is to date, an axiom that continues to apply right up to the time of the Islamic conquest, when Islamic chroniclers began to record events with some degree of accuracy. This difficulty is exemplified by the controversy which still persists today regarding the exact period of the reign of Kanishka, the great Kushana ruler, the dating of which continues to be a bone of contention, although he held sway in northern India no more than four or five hundred years after Ashoka Maurya. No

# Country of Two Rivers

amount of textual criticism or purportedly historical witnesses have made it possible to ascertain exactly when those great and highly informative epic poems, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, came into being. Nor are we able to assign precise dates to the historical events they describe. In this book, therefore, we shall adhere to the points of reference alluded to at the beginning of this chapter and which are no longer contested by the majority of historians. At the same time we concede that the period of Indian history with which we are here concerned, namely the fourth and third centuries B.C., is one which is historically ascertainable in the narrowest sense. But since our concept of history is not restricted to the existence of inscriptions or to the testimony of contemporary sources, we shall consider this period in the wider context of Indian history as a whole, and as forming a sequel to the historical epochs described in the preceding chapters.

Many people believe that it was not until now that Indian art proper made its appearance in the north Indian region, for they regard art as the corollary of the great Indian religions and of the Jain, Buddhist and Vedic-Brahmanic-Hindu doctrines. Folk art, however, is wholly left out of account by such a view in which art becomes the lowly handmaiden of religion and its practice a duty incumbent on certain groups of craftsmen by reason of their caste, the nature of their work being determined by the



*Shilpashastras*, the written canons of the orthodox priesthood. Yet the influence of these texts, being almost exclusively representative of the "established" religions, should not be overestimated. Though potent in the field of classical art, it was limited to a certain span of time and to certain strata of society, and was by no means representative of the country's creative artistic production as a whole. This intolerance, if such it may be called, emanated from the presumptuousness of the orthodox religious hierarchy, the effects of which also made themselves felt in the princely courts. For in India even monarchs continued for centuries to submit to the authority of the priests, nor is there perhaps any other country in which ecclesiastical art may be so nearly equated with sumptuary court art. Very little has been preserved from the pre-Islamic period of independent court art in the narrower sense of the term. Practically none of the older castles or palaces has survived, nor is there much evidence of the contemporary urban art. Here the only exceptions were the dynasties of Buddhist persuasion who were necessarily much less in thrall to the priestly hierarchy and have therefore left behind far more in the way of secular art. In course of time the urban complexes, whose character had been determined by the early Buddhist rulers, were superseded by the ceremonial centres of the Hindu dynasties, and in much the same way the popular representational works peculiar to early Buddhist architecture fell into desuetude, to be replaced by images that proclaimed the power and glory of the Hindu pantheon. It was not until about half way through the second millennium of our era that the Hindu rulers sought to emulate their Islamic counterparts and evolve a sumptuary court art of their own. But although there were already indications of this development in the north, and notably

in Rajasthan, we shall have to postpone our discussion of it until the next chapter in which we shall be dealing with the art of southern India. In conclusion, then, it may be permissible to posit some degree of narrow exclusivity, if it be assumed that, in the northern region, unlike southern and central India, the pre-Brahmanic cults were so far integrated into the high religions as to be rendered virtually unrecognizable. That this process, which took place in the north, was merely a manifestation of external pressures, however, is evident from the fact that the decline of orthodoxy during the Islamic and colonial periods was accompanied by the re-emergence of pre-Brahmanic cults in the sphere of art.

Yet all this while Indian folk art was unremittently present, both in the north and in other parts of the subcontinent, as we know if only from the fact that, no sooner had orthodoxy been partially eliminated and its constraints correspondingly reduced, than folk art began visibly to flourish, first in the country and later, by extension, in the towns. This is especially true of the more recent folk art in the region under discussion. To folk art, so far as its continued existence, or rather its re-emergence, was concerned, the Islamic invasion and the consolidation of British colonial rule constituted a kind of release, a liberation from the cultural limbo—wherever, that is, culture can be said to have survived.

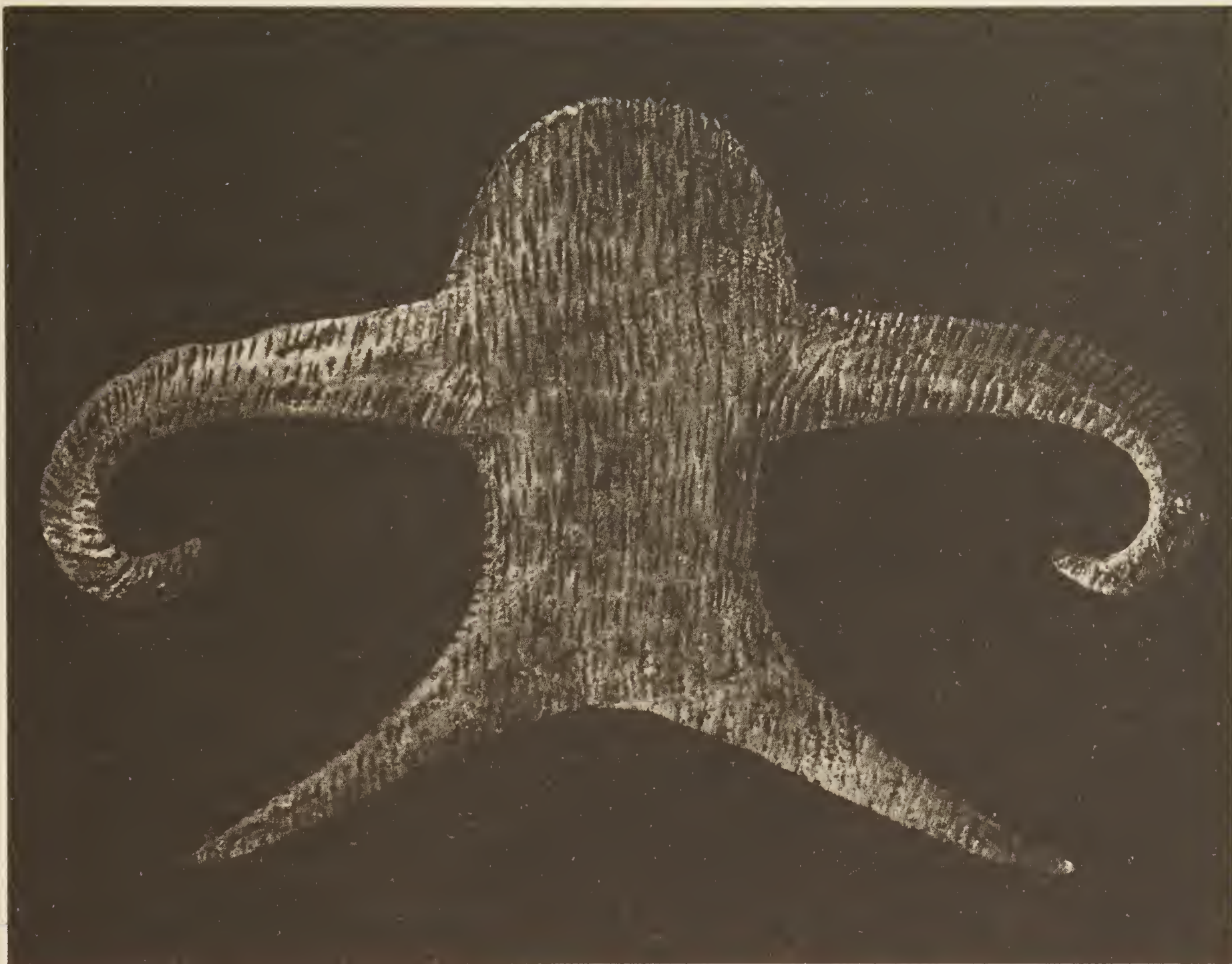
Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were the key territories of those north Indian rulers, notably the Maurya and Gupta dynasties, whose dominion, exercised from Pataliputra (now Patna), also comprised many other parts of India. The seat of the Kushana dynasty, to which we have already alluded, was Mathura, south of Delhi. But its rule extended far beyond the frontiers of India to take in part of Afghanistan and Central Asia. The economic importance of northern

India, however, has always lain in the density of its population whose subsistence has been assured by the fertility of the river valleys, and by the cultivation of rice in particular. This applies to the whole area, including the idyllic country in the foothills of the lofty northern mountain ranges.

The Vedic Aryans, whose origins are still veiled in the mists of time, entered the region under discussion from the west and the north-east. One of our chief sources of information on this score is the *Mahabharata* which contains accounts of the tribal dynasties' semi-urban seats of government and mentions the names of places where the more important battles were fought. Archaeological discoveries have enabled us to identify a number of these battlefields with some degree of certainty. At this period Delhi, the present capital of India, must already have been a centre of some importance.

From northern India, all the trade routes ran westwards and eastwards, linking the interior, with its fertile river valleys, to the ports of Gujarat and Bengal. However, a direct route to the south would then seem to have been rendered well-nigh impassable by the obstacles presented by the Vindhya Mountains as well as by impenetrable jungle. Here, in these dense forests, political refugees sought and found asylum. On the plains of northern India, trade and communications were easier, thus favouring the rapid dissemination of unorthodox doctrines which, however, were no less rapidly repressed or consigned to the peripheral areas. It was here that the Buddha first expounded his doctrine in towns and villages, while, very soon after, Buddhist monks began to settle in the forests and mountains further south. At first they took up temporary abodes in natural caves, subsequently enlarging these sites to form large monastic complexes on the mountain sides. The walls





of their dwellings and places of worship were decorated with paintings.

Not only were the north Indian plains fertile and hence favourable to the settlement of a rapidly increasing population but, being easily overrun, proved attractive to foreign invaders who, in quick succession, entered India, almost always from the north-west.

These events were accompanied by a rate of social and economic development more rapid than had ever before been experienced on the subcontinent. As a result of the perpetual conflicts with the foreign intruders, many of whom settled in the region, the north became the scene of changing political fortunes and of technical, social

and cultural innovation. Here, more than anywhere else in India, the indigenous population had to yield to the new and the imported. On the other hand, there is no mistaking the conscious endeavour in these same regions to stabilize economic and political conditions in accordance with a prearranged plan. This resulted in the con-

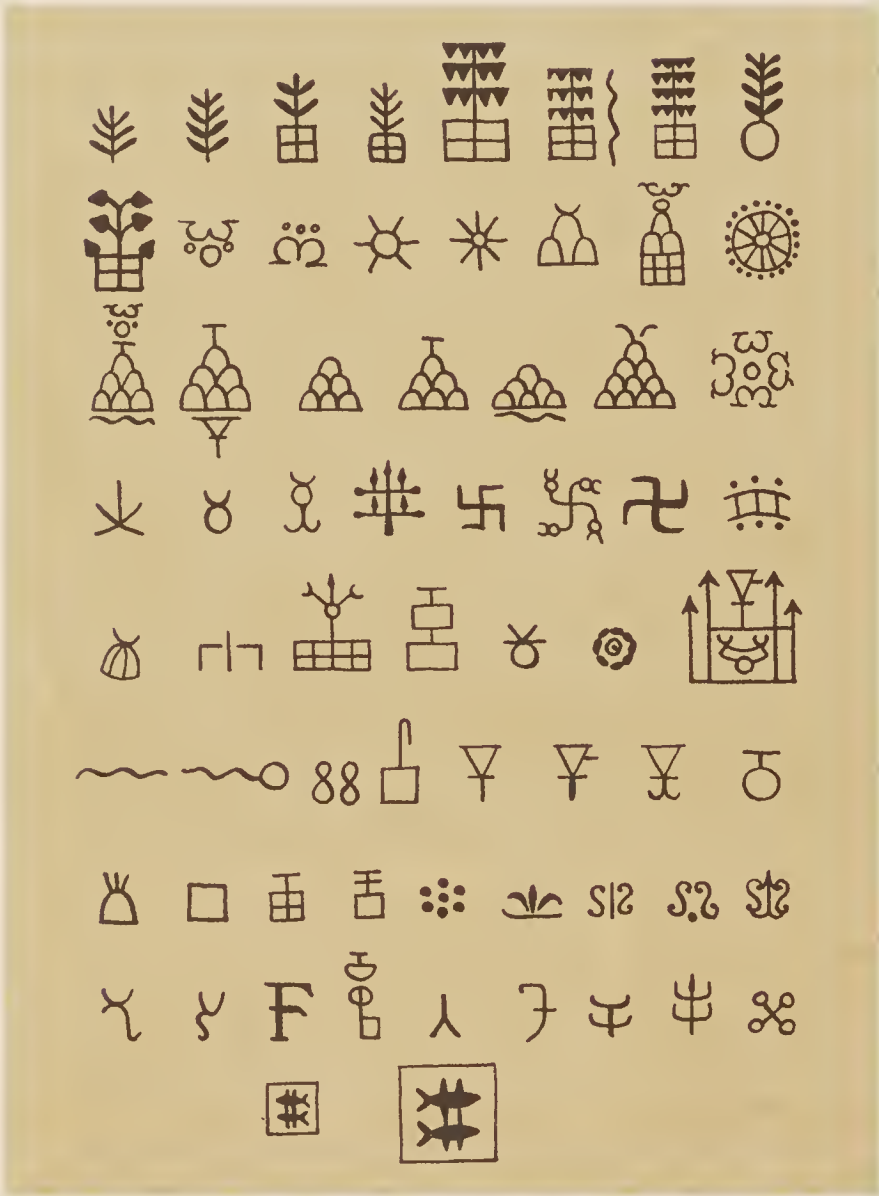
258 Anthropomorphic idol (?), Copper Hoard Culture. Northern India, 2nd millennium B.C.



solidation of dynastic power, the unification and territorial aggrandizement of the state, and the establishment, within what was an increasingly rigid caste structure, of an hierarchical system headed by the Brahmans or priests and the Kshatriyas or warriors. The economic and political primacy of northern India—a primacy that has lasted for more than three millennia and still obtains today—must be attributed not least to its geographical position. Delhi and Agra grew in importance as Islamic centres of power, while under British rule first Calcutta, and then Delhi, became the seat

of central government. In 1947, with the foundation of an independent Indian state, Delhi retained its position as capital city. As we have already mentioned in previous chapters—a point to which we shall revert in the next—the history of India as a whole has, for many millennia, followed a different pattern and is of very much greater antiquity than that of the north as such. This being so, the latter’s position of primacy, founded as it was on circumstances of a largely political nature, can in no way be regarded as the only determining factor. If we take into account the history of Indian civilization and,

in particular, that of the development of Indian art, we shall find that the period under review was a strictly limited one which cannot lay any absolute claim to immutability. While no attempt should be made to derogate from the role played in the history of the subcontinent by northern India, we should beware of rating it too highly. Today large industrial complexes and the availability of raw materials have meant that India’s centre of gravity has tended increasingly to shift further south. And indeed any survey of the great subcontinent which takes into account the future as well as the



259 Zoomorphic and vegetable symbols.  
Early punch-marked coins. Taxila, Pakistan.



260 Punch-marks on tribal coins.  
2nd half of 1st millennium B.C.



past, cannot ignore these changes any more than it can ignore the above-mentioned developments in the history of civilization. Traditions which represent a national identity should not be, as it were, arbitrarily restricted to specific periods in history. From a strictly national viewpoint, tradition is meaningful only if we take account of all the factors in every phase of its development and make them the basis for a genuine cultural entity comprehending the entire nation.

The earliest witnesses to the art of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal take the form of

painted village ceramics and terracotta sculpture. These pieces are of relatively later date than those found in the central and north-western parts of India, and betray a certain affinity with the village cultures of the latter region. While the Harappan culture sent offshoots as far afield as the area north of Delhi, that is to say right into Uttar Pradesh, there is no evidence, in the third millennium B.C., of any wholesale penetration of that region. Bengal, in the east, and Assam and the frontier territories in the extreme north-east—areas already discussed in Chapter I—were probably inhabited from

earliest times by tribes whose close kinship, cultural no less than ethnic, with their neighbours on the far side of the Indian frontier can hardly be in doubt. For the peoples who made their way into the sub-continent came not only from the north-west but also from the mountainous regions in the north-east if not, perhaps, in such great numbers, yet in successive waves, the first of which reached India in the earliest years of her history. In so far as they may be gauged in our present state of knowledge, the historical consequences were of far greater moment in the north-west than in



#### 261 Yakshas.

Left: Colossal figure, stone. Patna, Bihar, about 2nd century B.C.

Right: Figure from railing pillar, stone. Mathura. Uttar Pradesh, 2nd century A.D.

#### 262 Tree deities.

Stone. Mathura. Uttar Pradesh, 2nd century A.D.





the north-east. In the first, we witness the formation of the earliest political system to arise on Indian soil, in the second the settlement of tribes whose culture, having remained virtually static for thousands of years, has only recently begun, if at an ever-increasing rate, to become integrated into the general culture of India.

A somewhat different approach is called for in a consideration of Bengal. In the section of Indian history with which this chapter is concerned, it must be seen in close conjunction with the north Indian regions discussed above. The borders between Bihar and Bengal may be regarded as permeable, if only because both territories are traversed by that great river, the Ganges, which joins its distributary, the mighty Hooghly, in Bengal and enters the Bay of Bengal below Calcutta. At this point there arose the port of Tamralipti (now Tamluk) the role of which, in the period we are considering, was to be of exceptional importance. However, the earlier history of Bengal still remains shrouded in the mists of time. True, intensive research has succeeded in revealing traces of archaic settlements. But so far as the writer is aware, no one has yet produced a coherent appreciation and analysis that might be capable of throwing light on the especial position occupied by Bengal in later times.

The relations of the northern region with central India are also of some interest. Although it was not until the period discussed

in this chapter that northern India slowly began to establish connections with the south, movements of tribes from central India to the south bank of the Ganges are known to have occurred at a far earlier date. Indeed, paintings have been discovered here in rock shelters which are not unlike the rock paintings of central India. Mention has already been made of the fact that parts of southern Bengal and Bihar are inhabited by remnants of a tribal population whose closest kin are to be found in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa.

So far as the art of our region in the second and early part of the first millennium B.C. is concerned, little or no archaeological material is available if we disregard the somewhat uninformative, though admittedly interesting, anthropomorphic weapons of the so-called copper hoard culture and the grey painted ware of which the characteristic decoration is confined to a few geometrical motifs. The first specific information concerning artistic developments in northern India is provided by finds belonging to the Maurya period, scanty as these are, even by comparison with those of earlier and, more especially, of subsequent epochs, which have yielded a particularly rich store. In purely quantitative terms, the Harappan art of the third millennium B.C. must be regarded as far surpassing the much later art of the Maurya dynasty. The monuments that can be attributed with any certainty to the powerful Indian state of the Ashoka

period are few and far between, though the still extant Ashoka pillars with their zoomorphic capitals are impressive, as are a number of other stone and terracotta sculptures, the dating of which however still remains problematic. A similar dearth characterizes the remnants of the former capital, Pataliputra, once so remarkable a city according to the accounts of Classical authors.

In seeking to establish the continuity of Indian folk art we may cite two important classes of archaeological material, both of which fall roughly within this period: on the one hand, coins of which there are numerous local examples, on the other, terracotta figurines. The earliest Indian money consisted for the most part of rectangular punch-marked silver coins known as *karshapanas* after their standard weight, namely 3.5 grains. That the latter date back to the Harappan period is evident from the discovery by archaeologists of carefully fashioned stone weights of similar date and precisely the same denomination—a denomination not encountered elsewhere.<sup>67</sup> Of greatest interest to us in this context are the punch marks which occur, not only on local money, usually described as tribal coinage, but also on imperial issues. These constitute a system of pictographs, the exact interpretation and evaluation of which is, however, highly problematical. But in pictorial terms such pictographs form links in a tradition going back more than ten

#### 263 Medallions.

Stone. Mathura, Uttar Pradesh,  
about 2nd century A.D.



thousand years and which embraces rock engravings, certain forms of pottery decoration, Harappan stamp seals and characters, tattoo marks and, finally, the symbols used by Hindu households in the art of ritual floor painting.

Coins, the issue of which was subject to state control, were intended for the use of people in all walks of life. Hence, it is no matter for surprise that the symbols with which they were struck should be of a popular and concrete nature. Indeed, they constituted a picture language which must be assumed to have been generally comprehensible at that time. This is not to say that a picture language, the meaning of which leaps to the eye of the actual user, can also be read or interpreted without more ado by an outsider—by the beholder of today, for instance.<sup>68</sup>

Though *karshapanas* were probably first introduced in northern India, they have been discovered all over the rest of the country. In the north-west, as in southern India, they bore punch-marks which varied according to locality. In the south they would appear to have persisted longer than anywhere else and are known to have occurred as late as the fifth century A.D. or thereabouts. In the north, on the other hand, new currencies, mostly of Graeco-Bactrian origin, came into use between the second and third centuries B.C., though *karshapanas* also remained in circulation for several centuries after that.

It was long assumed that an archaeological gap existed between the time of the Harappan culture and that of the Maurya period. By now, however, there have been suffi-

cient, if isolated, discoveries belonging to the period between the second millennium and the third century B.C. to help us bridge that gap. There still remains the fact that production of these small artefacts declined in the late second millennium and early part of the first, at the very time when the Aryans were supposedly making their way from north-west to east, and it is tempting to seek some causal connections here. One of the characteristics of these pastoral nomads may have been iconoclasm, or at any rate an initial indifference to representational art in any shape or form. This would not necessarily have disrupted the continuity of Indian artistic development, but might well have presented a serious obstacle to it. Hence it is not surprising that we should find it easier to trace that continuity in those regions least affected by the Aryan invasion, namely Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh in central India.

The great Indian religions, Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism, which may be assumed to have existed side by side in northern India from about 500 B.C. onwards, cannot be identified in any of the monuments that survive from that period. It can only be supposed that the representational art of the pre-Maurya period consisted in statuary made of perishable materials—in all probability wood. If so, it has disappeared without trace, as have any paintings which may have existed at the time. Yet from a number of stone figures which survive from the Maurya period and later we can infer the extent to which art was subservient to rural popular beliefs. At first, independently of the high religions, those beliefs would appear to have determined the nature of representational art, as they continued to do until well after the Buddha and Mahavira had begun to preach and to inveigh against the then all-powerful orthodoxy of the Brahmins.

But even where we possess indisputable evidence of the existence of Brahmanic, Buddhist and Jain art prior to and in the early years of our era, two quite distinct trends are discernible. The first is known to us from the literary tradition where we find accounts of strongly individualized anthropomorphic figures of deities from the Indian pantheon—whose evolution began already in early Vedic times. The second consists in sculptures, traditional representations, mainly in the form of terracotta figures of a more generalized and universal type, often a female deity or mother-goddess. This category also comprises the tree deities, the Yakshas and the Nagas, as well as numerous zoomorphic figures. Thus, taken as a whole, and in marked contrast to the literary tradition, representational art long continued to adhere to the subject-matter inherited from village cultures and the Harappan civilization, while at the same time certain types such as the Yakshas and Nagas acquired the status of local deities. Similarly, local female deities, such as earth and mountain goddesses, sprang from the universal type of the mother-goddess who, closely linked with trees and animals, continued to exist in her own right.

Prominent among the cults integrated into the anti-orthodox religions of the Buddha



264 Decorative necklaces with Buddhist symbols. Stone reliefs. Sanchi, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, 1st century A.D.

[67] KOSAMBI, D. D., *Das alte Indien*, Berlin, 1969, p. 144. .

[68] List of signs in: DAS GUPTA, K. K., *A Tribal History of Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1974, pp. 311–313.



and Mahavira were those of the Yakshas and Nagas. In the process, which is amply documented by the texts and by sculpture, the village cults adapted themselves both in form and content to the doctrines of the new higher religions, the Yakshas, Nagas and Vrikshakas or tree deities, being pressed into service as guardians, helpers and tutelaries.

The foregoing may also be regarded from a different angle. For the vast majority of the people the process of integration was so gradual that everything remained much as it had always been. It was still possible for an adherent to the new religions to retain his belief in magic and in the worship of the old nature deities, the idols of the folk religions, without at the same time undergoing conscious conversion to theistic beliefs, or so restructuring his faith as to subscribe to priestly doctrine. In so far as this happened, it was restricted to a relatively small professional circle. The knowledge, at that time predominantly religious, conveyed by the written word, was of benefit only to the few. For the mass of the people there remained, initially at least, not only what we now know to have been oral preaching of an extremely graphic kind, but also and above all the concrete and visible products of representational art and, with them, preserved almost intact and unchanged, the ancient tradition of folk art.

Hence it would be quite wrong to speak of iconoclasm in, say, early Buddhist art merely on the grounds that the Buddha is not at first depicted in human form. For anthropomorphic figures of Yakshas and Nagas abound in early Buddhist monuments, as do representations of the mother-goddess, now become a voluptuous tree deity, in all her naked, familiar femininity. Symbols were used to depict the more important events, not in a spirit of iconoclasm, but rather to give the masses, already



265/266 Tiger riders.  
Contemporary pat-paintings. Bengal.



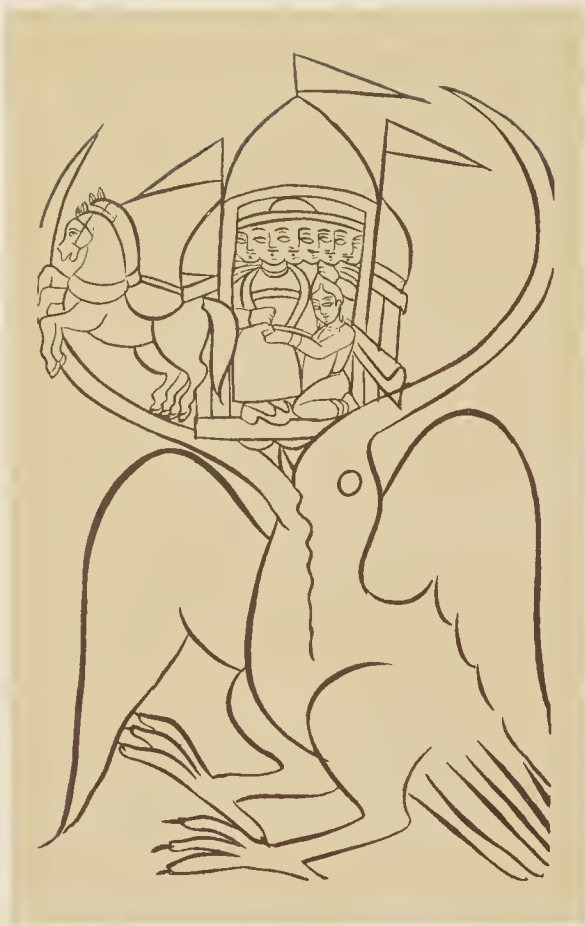
conversant with the pictographic tradition, a better understanding of the life and teachings of the religious founder. In the guise of an elephant the Buddha enters his mother's womb; leaning against a tree, his mother gives birth to her son; on a throne beneath a tree he experiences enlightenment; and here too, still represented by a symbol, he sets the wheel of dharma (the law) in motion; the enlarged grave-mound or stupa indicates deliverance, the entry into Nirvana, but also, and at the same time, the permanent and enduring presence of the Buddha. The elephant, the tree, the throne, the revolving wheel, the stupa, all of them long-familiar traditional symbols, left the common man in no doubt as to the message they were intended to convey. Here we have convincing evidence of both the vigour and the continuity of the ancient picture language of folk art. Hence, at a turning-point in Indian art history, when Indian classical art is just beginning to declare itself, folk art as the basis of all other art once more becomes the determining factor. Thus the indirect information to be gleaned from early Buddhist art is of the utmost importance where the history of folk art is concerned, and we shall therefore consider it at greater length here. Early Buddhist representations have always been described as popular, but they are more than that. Here we find applied folk art, translated to the sphere of religious and, perhaps, also sumptuary court art, the intention being, however, to transform, with the aid of durable materials, an impermanent, if perpetually self-reproducing, mode of representation into a new and enduring world of imagery. It has long been noted that the standing Buddha-Bodhisatva, the earliest type of representation known to us, bears a close formal resemblance to the earlier Yaksha statues which are believed to have been executed during the Maurya or the Shunga

period. Thematically speaking, these colossal figures, all of which are at least life-size, evidently still form part of the folk art tradition while, as monumental stone sculptures, they already express a new artistic quality, a striving after naturalism. Neither by their form nor by their material do they qualify as products of true folk art. The transition from the archaic communal art of the village to the official art of the town was already complete. Further light is thrown on that transition by the inscription found on some of the statues, thus enabling us to place the latter in their historical context and to glean information as to their function and content. Such inscriptions, by attesting the unique nature of the work, free it from the anonymity of early folk art with its constant parthenogenesis. What we have here is not so much an artistic renaissance, but rather a new departure in which works of art become, as it were, the exclusive province of the professional craftsman on the one hand and the customer on the other. Even such unequivocal works as the celebrated memorial pillars of the Maurya ruler, Ashoka, bear eloquent witness to the process outlined above. The best-known of these lofty monumental structures, with their inscriptions and zoomorphic capitals, is the Ashoka pillar at Sarnath, which may be regarded as one of the most important examples of the art of the third century B.C. The four animals by which it is surmounted are lions. Clearly power symbols representing kingship, they are of ancient, non-Indian, oriental provenance and may have been borrowed from the Persian-Achaemenid repertory originally. Here we have a monument in which Ashoka made manifest his claim to imperial power. The material, consisting of grey sandstone, and the high polish of shafts and figures, to mention only a few outstanding qualities, represent something new though not wholly unpre-

cedented in Indian art. For both the themes and the excellence of the workmanship are reminiscent of some of the seals and small sculptures of the Harappan period, works which already bore the stamp of urban official art. And here another comparison inevitably imposes itself. If we examine the circular abacus upon which the lions are seated, we find wheel symbols as well as four animals—horse, elephant, lion and humped bull—which, as it were, process endlessly round the capital. Two of these creatures, the elephant and the humped bull, may be regarded as typically Indian and, indeed, to judge by what we find in Harappan art, as peculiarly characteristic of the earliest representational art, an observa-







tion similarly endorsed by rock paintings in which these animals also occur. The animal foursome is also an Indian theme and it, too, may be traced back to the Harappan period. Here we would cite the Harappan stamp seal, already the subject of an exhaustive appreciation, in which an enthroned deity is surrounded by four beasts—an elephant, a tiger, a rhinoceros and a buffalo, all of them indigenous. Of these only the elephant is found in the Sarnath relief where the tiger is replaced by a lion and the rhinoceros and buffalo by a horse and a bull. The horse is a newcomer to the Indian artistic repertory, at any rate in its symbolic role of royal mount. The same applies to the bull which, along with the lion, had always been a symbol of royal power in the Ancient Orient. So far as pictorial tradition is concerned, then, this change of zoomorphic motifs is of the utmost importance. Near



Eastern symbolic animals take the place of indigenous ones which are no longer used to proclaim the power of the monarch. Thus the combination of indigenous and foreign symbols gradually led to the creation of a new artistic idiom that was not only comprehensible to the people but commanded their respect. Yet there is no denying that it was also an instrument with which the new ruling classes imposed upon the people, as it were from above, a new form of art and a new way of comprehending it. It marked a turning-point in the history of Indian art. Uttar Pradesh, together with the peripheral regions to the east of the twin rivers, the Ganges and the Yamuna, as also Kumaon, Bihar and Bengal are still, or have again become, important centres of living folk art. Also characteristic of northern India is the tribal art, already alluded to, of the southern and eastern parts of the region under

discussion, the areas, that is to say, immediately adjacent to central India and the north-east; here mention should also be made of the village folk art practised in this area by sedentary peasants, the rustic nature of which has not been without influence on the art of the towns. Moreover, Hinduism is strongly in evidence in the choice of subject-matter, although there is no lack of Islamic themes for, as in the rest of India, large sections of the rural population have gone over to that faith. As a rule, however, social and economic conditions have, in such cases, remained much as they have always been, since conversion to Islam or, for that matter, to any of the other religions, is seldom more than a superficial manifestation, as it were the mere donning of a mask. Nor, for the most part, is it difficult to detect, whether in folk tales, myths and songs, or again in folk art the older and more deeply rooted beliefs which underlie the common traditions.<sup>69</sup>

The largest group of rural painters in this part of India consists of the *patuas* of Bengal and—closely related to them in terms of caste—the *jadupatuas* of Bihar. There is no consensus as to the derivation or meaning of the word *pat* (*pata*), of which we have already encountered the variant *par* in Rajasthan. If it is related to the Sanskrit word *pat-ta*, its use in connection with picture scrolls may be of very early date. On the other hand its local association with the term “stuffs” and “textiles” must also be borne in mind. In present-day usage the word *patua*

[69] One of the clearest examples of this is provided by the popular ballads of Mymensingh, East Bengal (now Bangladesh). Cf. MODE, H., and ZBAVITEL, D., *Bengalische Balladen*, Leipzig, 1976.

[70] SEN GUPTA, S. (Ed.), *The Patas and Patuas of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1973 (Symposium).

[71] ARCHER, M., *Indian Popular Painting*, London, 1977, pp. 15 ff.

267 Scene from the *Ramayana*.  
Pat-drawing. Kalighat, Bengal, 19th century.

268 Woman cooking.  
Contemporary pat-drawing. Kalighat, Bengal.



denotes a painter of picture scrolls. These men, of very lowly social status, are looked down upon by Hindus and Muslims alike. In Bihar and Bengal they are both Hinduized and Muslimized, participate in Hindu and Muslim festivals and practice their craft wherever opportunity offers.<sup>70</sup> We would remind the reader that, unlike the *patuas*, the *chitrakathis* of Maharashtra and the *par*-painters of Rajasthan are all of them

members of the Hindu community and as such probably occupy a higher place in the social scale.

Of especial interest are the *jadupatuas* or magic painters, whose picture scrolls were produced specifically for the Santals, a tribal group having their own traditions and their own language. These people, who have long been sedentary, are being converted to the Hindu faith in ever increasing



269 Cuckolded husband slays his faithless wife.  
Pat-drawing, Kalighat, Bengal.



numbers. Their painted scrolls, originally, no doubt, made of cloth, are now manufactured by gluing pieces of paper together and, unlike those of the *chitrakathis* and *par*-painters, are designed to unwind vertically. They also differ in content in that the scenes they depict are tailored to the desires and concepts of the Santals. The flat planes of the individual pictures, the few brilliant colours by which the figures are distinguished one from the other, the large heads and exaggerated eyes, the preference for the full profile view and the uncomplicated, naïve presentation of the subject-matter, are characteristic features which nearly all these narrative paintings share in common. The subjects depicted in the paintings of the *jadupatuas* would appear to be confined to seven main thematic groups<sup>71</sup>: Life in the realm of the dead; the Santal myth of creation; Santal festivities; Santal dances;

270 Cat devouring a fish.  
Pat-drawing by Nibaran Chandra Ghosh.  
Kalighat, Bengal.



the emblems of the Santal clans; a figure mounted on a tiger (or leopard); selected scenes from the life of Krishna as parallels to scenes from the life of the Santals. The most interesting, and probably the most common, of these motifs is the figure of the tiger rider, of which a great many variants are to be encountered. In most of these the tiger rider may be identified as a Muslim by his prayer beads and his dress. This holy man or Satya Pir is worshipped as one who, it is believed, provides protection against marauding tigers. Ideas such as these correspond to the Santals' interpretation of the word *bonga* (ghost or spirit) as a tiger rider or tiger tamer. In Bengal, the so-called Barakhan Gazi is similarly depicted and is worshipped as a deity by the Muslim population.

How far such ideas of gods and spirits go back is necessarily a matter for conjecture, nor is there any unequivocal answer to the question of whether the Santals ever produced such paintings themselves. Conclusions can only be arrived at by a process of general analysis which must take account not only of the magic concepts of the tribal population, but also of the prohibitions, previously alluded to, whereby these peoples were barred from the pursuit of specific callings. In historical terms tribal magic is older than village ritual, though the latter still contains vestiges of earlier magic practices. Again, we should recall the original role played in India by the tiger, a creature whose pre-eminence over all other beasts in Indian folk art has remained unchallenged even by the lion—never, in fact, a pretender to that role. On the other hand, the teachings of Islam contain no allusions to the worship of tiger spirits or tiger deities, for Islam originated, not in the land of the tiger but in that of the lion. Accordingly, there can be no doubt that this was a borrowing, an importation, which leads us inevitably to



271 Snake caught by a peacock.  
Pat-drawing. Kalighat, Bengal.



the conclusion, already put forward in this book, to the effect that early Indian beliefs, at least so far as the general mass of the population was concerned, could not, in the local and rural sphere, be neutralized by the influence of the high religions.

The following may serve to underscore the above observations. It has been reported that, in the cycle we have already touched upon, depicting life in the realm of the dead, the *jadupatuas* would include paintings of eyeless figures. With these they would proceed to the Santal villages and, on hearing of a recent death, would seek out the bereaved relatives and console them by offering, in return for an appropriate fee, to paint in the missing eyes, thus helping to better the future lot of the deceased. Here again we may discern an ancient thaumaturgic practice, the influence of which has even extended to Indian classical art. Thus, when an individual religious statue was complete but for the eyes, a special ceremony would be held in which eyes made of precious material would be inserted into the empty sockets to signify, as it were, a process of animation or reanimation. Even images of the Buddha were not always exempt from this practice.

It should be further remarked that, in colouring their pictures, the *jadupatuas* were not attempting to achieve a naturalistic rendering of the subject portrayed. The body of a tiger may be painted yellow, blue or green, and examples are known of blue elephants and crimson horses. Colouring in folk art is primarily aimed at emphasizing this or that figure, and so evoking a response in the beholder that is visual and emotive. The clarity of the message the picture is intended to convey takes pride of place over naturalistic and aesthetic considerations. While the paintings are governed by reality, it is not a reality circumscribed by so-called natural perception. Rather the ar-



272 The toilet.  
Kalighat pat on paper. Calcutta, 19th century,  
45.7 × 28 cm.





tist is at pains so to combine the conceptual with the purely visual as to create a new entity. Thus, changes of colour, adjustments of proportion, the enlargement and coarsening of this or that feature, and the multiplication of heads and limbs produce a reality, comprehensible both to artist and beholder, that is not merely naturalistic and visual.

Developments in the later folk art of Bengal gave rise to a new and very interesting phenomenon, in that the *patuas* were also compelled to adapt to urban requirements. While adhering to their old traditions, they produced pictures for sale to pilgrims, as for instance, those visiting the Kali Temple in Calcutta. Here they catered for the cheap mass market, though the word cheap should

not be taken to imply that the articles were of small artistic value. The intention was that they should be within the means of everyone, including the poorest members of the community. As a result these painters also had to pay close attention to the secular interests and requirements of a very wide range of customers.

The nineteenth and early twentieth century

273 A rural picnic.  
Woodcut by Shri Gobinda Chandra Roy.  
Bengal, late 19th century.





*pat*-paintings of the Kalighat School were executed in the simplest possible manner, using a few brilliant colours, crudely outlined, and including only a minimum of detail. Since they were painted on paper, their life was very limited. Today very few examples survive of what must have been many thousands of pictures, and those few are in the safe keeping of collectors, so that arti-

cles that were once bought at negligible cost now possess a high market value. Woodcuts, too, have recently come to light, some of them coloured by hand. But so thin is the paper on which they were printed that they are probably even rarer than the original paintings from which, however, they differ little, either as regards style or content.

As already mentioned, the subject-matter of these pictures is by no means always confined to the actual cult of Kali. Many popular deities of the Hindu pantheon are depicted, the figure of Krishna and scenes from his life being especially favoured. But the style and techniques are the same, whether they are applied to religious themes such as these or to portrayals of, say,

274 Shri Sundar appears before Vidya.  
Woodcut by Shri Gobinda Chandra Roy.  
Bengal, late 19th century.







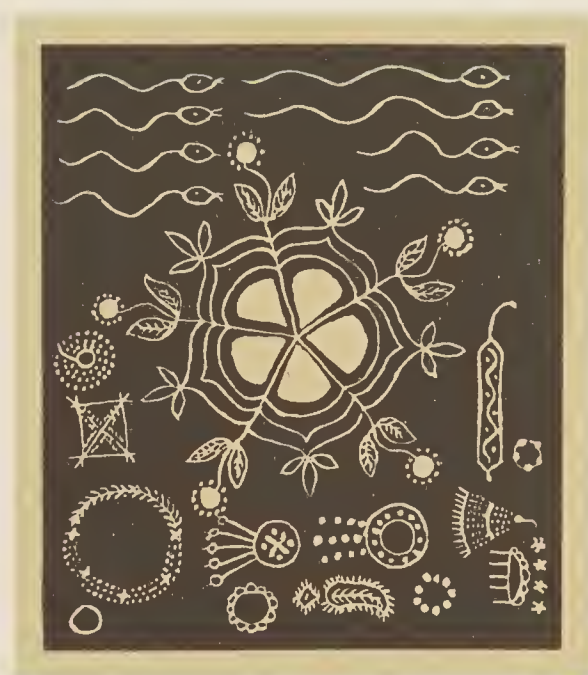
an idealized pair of lovers, a beauty with a rose in her hand or a dandy dressed up in all his finery. Many of the works are of a satirical nature, directed at targets such as the jealous husband who beats his wife. Indeed, they even record a *crime passionel*, namely the Tarakeshwar murder, which created a great stir at the time and involved a holy man whose role had been anything but creditable. Satire is also in evidence in the scene of a woman chasing off an importunate priest. Even the popular theme of a cat eating fish has satirical overtones as does that of carefree rats making merry while the master of the house whiles away his time with courtesans.

Some of the names of the Kalighat painters are known to us for, though signed paintings are fairly infrequent in India, they have become increasingly common in the folk art of recent times. In Bihar the painter-housewives often sign their work, or at any rate the designs, executed on paper upon which their large wall paintings are based. Now and again a craftsman may abandon his caste-related occupation, betake himself to a big city, become part of the modern artistic scene and thereafter pursue an independent course. However, only a very small proportion of the free-lance Indian artists of today are drawn from the castes of professional craftsmen or from the ranks of domestic amateur painters. The majority come from well-to-do urban homes, a sphere in which the Indian family hierarchy has long been in process of disintegration under the influence of the West.

The social satire encountered in the works of the Kalighat painters and of the other bazaar artists in Calcutta reflects the circumstances of the then political situation in Bengal. It finds expression, not only in indigenous literature, but also in terracotta sculpture, as for example in some of the reliefs adorning the Bengali terracotta tem-

ples. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century reformist tendencies have been increasingly in evidence. Their targets have included the immorality of the Hindu conservative tradition, as well as the dress and modes of behaviour of foreigners generally and of English colonials in particular. Yet insufficient attention has, perhaps, been paid to the fact that earlier Indian art has also had its share of social satire, a fact attested in collections of ancient folk tales in which humour is abundantly in evidence, while animal stories also serve as vehicles for satirical comment on human behaviour. Again, we might cite a well-known example in the field of representational art, namely, the great rock carving at Mamallapuram, south of Madras. Amongst the many scenes and figures here depicted is that of a cat standing on its hind legs, its forepaws raised above its head, seemingly oblivious of the mice at play around its feet—no doubt a sarcastic reference to the unworldly, abstracted pose assumed by the false ascetic. This may doubtless be regarded as an undisguisedly ironical expression of popular sentiment in the context of what is an otherwise serious monumental relief of a solemn and religious nature. In its immediate vicinity is a full-round rock carving of a group of monkeys searching their bodies for fleas. Again we may suppose this to have been a kind of private and fairly inconspicuous joke thought up by the craftsmen while engaged on this important commission. Though too few documents have survived to enable us to know what kind of work these seventh and eighth century craftsmen might have done on their own account in the villages, more recent Indian folk art does at least provide some justification for the above interpretation.

In this connection brief mention might also be made of a type of folk art encountered throughout Bengal, namely the painted



decoration applied to the convex outer surfaces of the shallow, crudely made clay bowls known as *sharas*. The paintings mainly consist of representations either of Lakshmi, the goddess of good fortune, or of other domestic deities, the style and composition being closely akin to those of the Kalighat School. Until very recently these pieces were sold in the bazaars of Calcutta at derisory prices, the majority being the work of east Bengal craftsmen who had come to the great capital city of west Bengal to convert their traditional products into

#### 275 Lakshmi.

Tortoise shell, executed by a non-professional woman artist. Bengal, 19th century.

276 Symbols and votive offerings to the snake goddess, Manasa. Alpona floor painting executed by Bengali women.

277 Illustration of a female ritual (brata). Alpona floor painting executed by Bengali women.



cash and thereby eke out a poverty-stricken existence. In this context it should be remembered that it was often cheaper to use clay rather than paper as the foundation for a painting. Nor was it unusual, when buying a cup of tea, to be given the little clay bowl which was not meant to be used more than once.

Amongst the professional painters of the region under discussion we must also include a Hindu caste in Bihar, specializing mainly in the manufacture of garlands, which, in India, also constitutes a branch of folk art. These people, the Malis of northern Bihar, in the vicinity of the Bengali border, manufactured small paper caskets, the surface of which was largely occupied by figures painted in a strange mixture of colours.<sup>72</sup> These caskets were designed for hanging in the home. The principal, heavily stylized, figure represents a snake-goddess, Bishahari or "remover of poison" who is worshipped by the villagers for her ability to protect them against snake-bites. Bishahari is the name given in this locality to the snake-goddess Manasa whose worship is associated in Bengal with numerous folk art products. On the Mali paper caskets, Bishahari is as often as not depicted in zoomorphic form.

However most of the folk art paintings in this region were not the work of professional artisans, but rather were carried out by women in their own homes. The latter works consisted of wall paintings and floor designs executed on the occasion, not only of the great festivals of the Hindu calendar, but also of private family celebrations, a practice which still survives here and there, though not always without some loss of quality. In Bengali folk tales and ballads we find these skilled female occupations described at some length, as in the following: "She [a young woman named Kajalrekha] kept handfuls of rice of a very fine qual-

ity—the shali—under water until they were thoroughly softened. Then she washed them carefully and pressed them on a stone. She prepared a white liquid paste with them and first of all she drew the adored feet of her parents which were always uppermost in her mind. [To touch the feet of elderly and respected persons is, in India, a mark of the greatest veneration and esteem.] She next drew two granaries taking care to paint the footsteps of the harvest goddess in the paths leading to them, and she introduced at intervals fine ears of rice drooping low with their burden. Then she drew the palace of the great god Shiva and his consort Parvati in the Kailasa mountains. In the middle of a big lotus leaf she painted Vishnu and Lakshmi seated together, and on a chariot drawn by the royal swan she painted the figure of Manasa Devi from whom all victories proceeded. Then she drew the figures of witches and the Siddhas who could perform miracles by tantric practices and next of the nymphs of heaven. She drew a sheora grove and under it the figure of Banadevi (the sylvan deity). Then she painted Raksha Kali, the goddess who saves us from all dangers. The warrior-god Kartikeya and the god of wisdom Ganesha she drew next with their respective bahanas or animals they rode. And then Rama and Sita and Lakshmana were drawn by her admirably. The great chariot Puspaka—the airborne vehicle—was sketched in her drawings and the gods Yama and Indra were also introduced in this panorama. She next painted the sea, the sun and the moon and last of all an old dilapidated temple in the middle of a woodland with the picture of a dead prince [the hero of the ballad] inside it. She drew all figures excepting her own. The figures of the Needle Prince [i.e. the aforesaid hero] and of his courtiers were all there—but not any of her own. When the painting was finished she kindled a lamp fed

by sacred butter and then she bowed down with her head bent to the ground."<sup>73</sup>

Few pictures could convey a clearer idea than does the text of the above ballad of the actual process of painting and of the individual details this particular artist proposed to portray. What we are witnessing here is a kind of pictorial incantation. The deities of the Hindu pantheon alluded to in the narrative are evidently seen as possessing human form, but mention is also made of the harvest goddess's footprints and of heavy-laden ears of rice in such a way as to suggest that they are pictographs denoting the time of year. All these, and in particular the many symbolic motifs, recur in the rich stock of Bengali floor designs, the *alponas* (also *alpanas* or *alipanas*), which are executed by women. Work of this kind has aroused widespread interest abroad, thanks largely to the activities of the Bengali painter, Abanindranath Tagore, nephew of the great poet, Rabindranath Tagore, who has been responsible for collecting and publicizing it. This art form has been the object of greater attention and concern in Bengal than in any other part of India. As a result we have been able to familiarize ourselves with many of the pictures and, in some cases, also to interpret them in the light of the religious household myths or *brata-kathas* related by Bengali women.<sup>74</sup>

Today *alpona* paintings have ceased to be the sole province of house and family and have been adopted by schools of art as a basis for aesthetic appreciation in as much as they provide an example of the modern

[72] ARCHER, M., *Indian Popular Painting*, London, 1977, pp. 67 ff.

[73] SEN, D. C., *Eastern Bengal Ballads Mymensingh*, I–IV, Calcutta, 1923 ff.; *Kajalrekha*, pp. 268/269.

[74] MODE, H., and RAY, A., *Brata-kathas*, Leipzig, 1964.











**279** Bullock team.  
Terracotta relief. Kausambi, Uttar Pradesh,  
1st century A.D., 9x8.5 cm.

**280** Wheeled ram. Terracotta.  
Chandraketugarh, Bengal, 1st century A.D.,  
14x16.5 cm.







**281** Mother goddess.  
Terracotta. Bangarh, Bengal,  
c. 2nd century A.D., height 15 cm.



**282** Elephant supporting lamp.  
Terracotta. Bihar, 32x30 cm.





**283** Car. Terracotta.  
Faridpur, Bengal, 20th century, 19x15x14 cm.





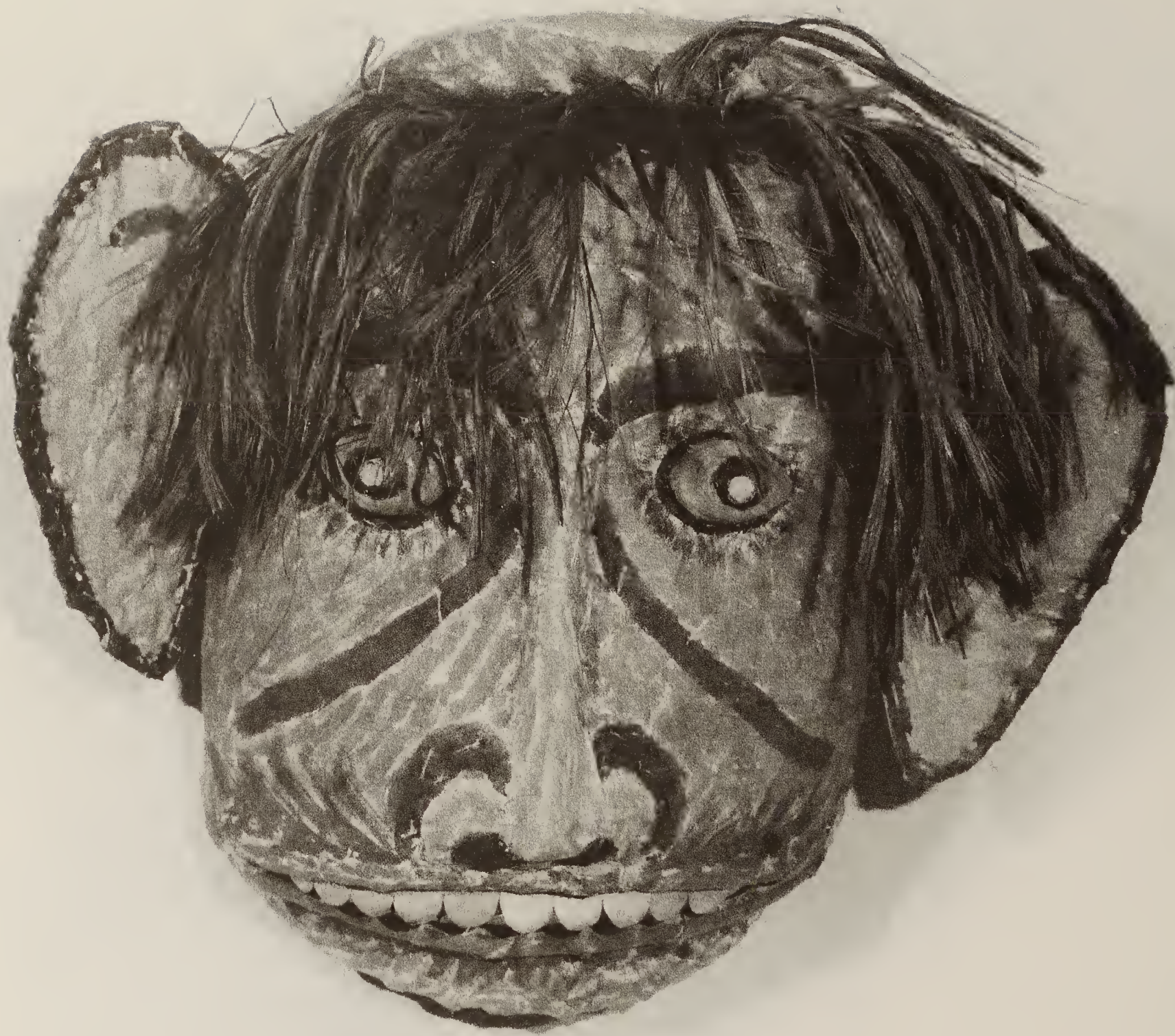


- 284** Horse.  
Terracotta. Bengal, 21 x 20 cm.
- 285** Durga.  
Terracotta. Bengal, 37 x 22 cm.
- 286** Tiger.  
Terracotta. Bengal, 16 x 16 cm.
- 287** Elephant.  
Terracotta. Bengal, 25 x 32 cm.

- 288** Animals.  
Terracotta, contemporary. Bengal,  
13 x 12 and 12.5 x 10.5 cm.







**289** Painted mask.  
Santal wood carving, Bihar (?).

**290** Lamp goddess.  
Terracotta. Bengal. 24 x 24 cm.









291 Mounted musicians.  
Terracotta plaque. Faridpur, Bengal,  
17th century, approx. 18x18 cm.





292 Hunting scene.  
Terracotta relief. Naldanga, Jessore, Bengal.  
16th century, 19 x 15 cm.









**293** Kantha embroidery.  
Jessore, Bengal, 19th century, 90x90 cm.

**294** Embroidery with gold and silver thread.  
Benares, Uttar Pradesh.





**295** Painted dancer's mask.  
Santal wood carving. Bihar.

**296** Painted mask.  
Wood carving. Bengal.













**297** Demon. Painted wooden mask. Bengal.

**298** Elephant and rider.  
Sikki grass basket work. Bihar.

Following pages:

**299/300** Scenes from the life of Krishna.  
Picture scroll, cloth. Bengal.











**301** Wedding.  
Painting on mica. Patna, Bihar, 14x18 cm.

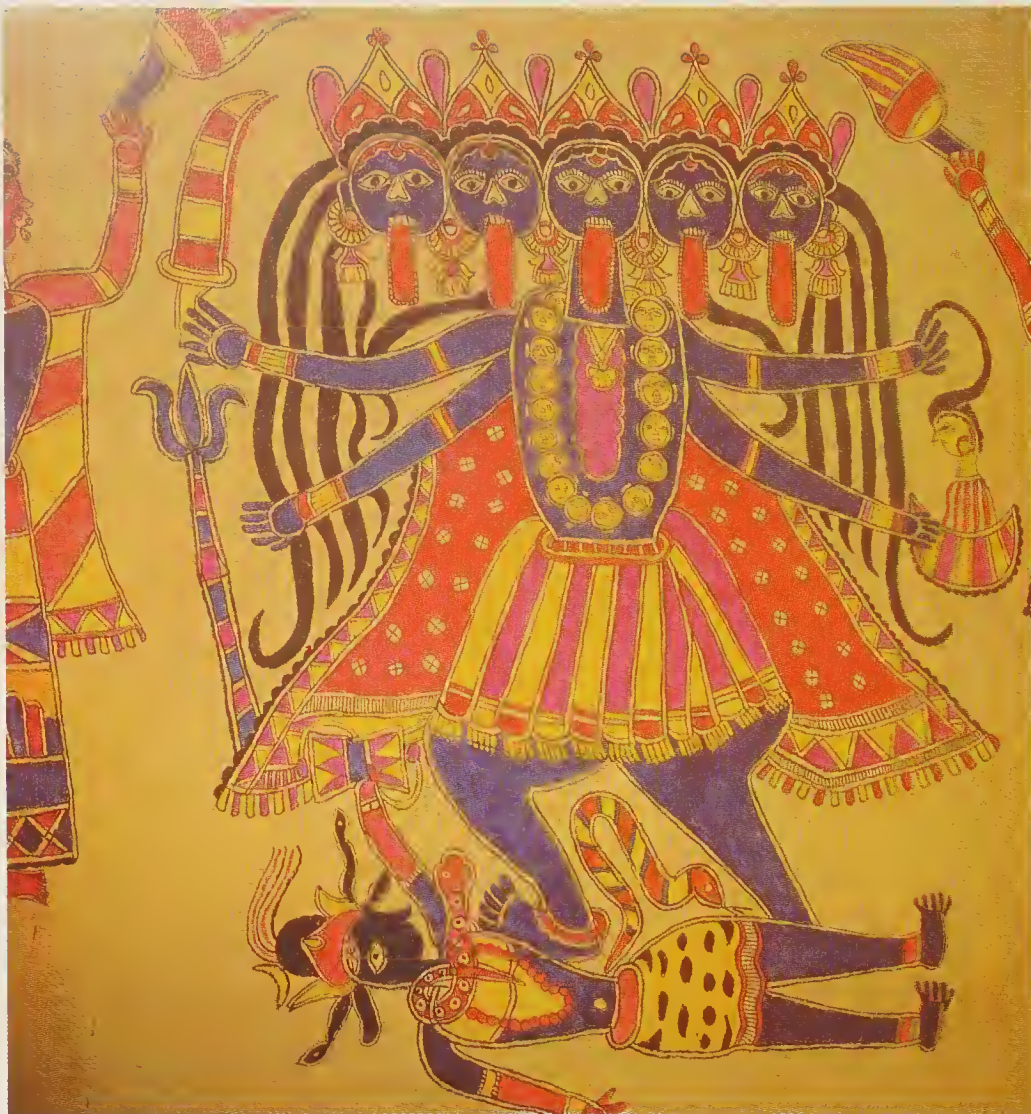


**302** Lakshmi-shara.  
Terracotta plaque. Faridpur, Bengal,  
early 20th century, diameter 15.4 cm.







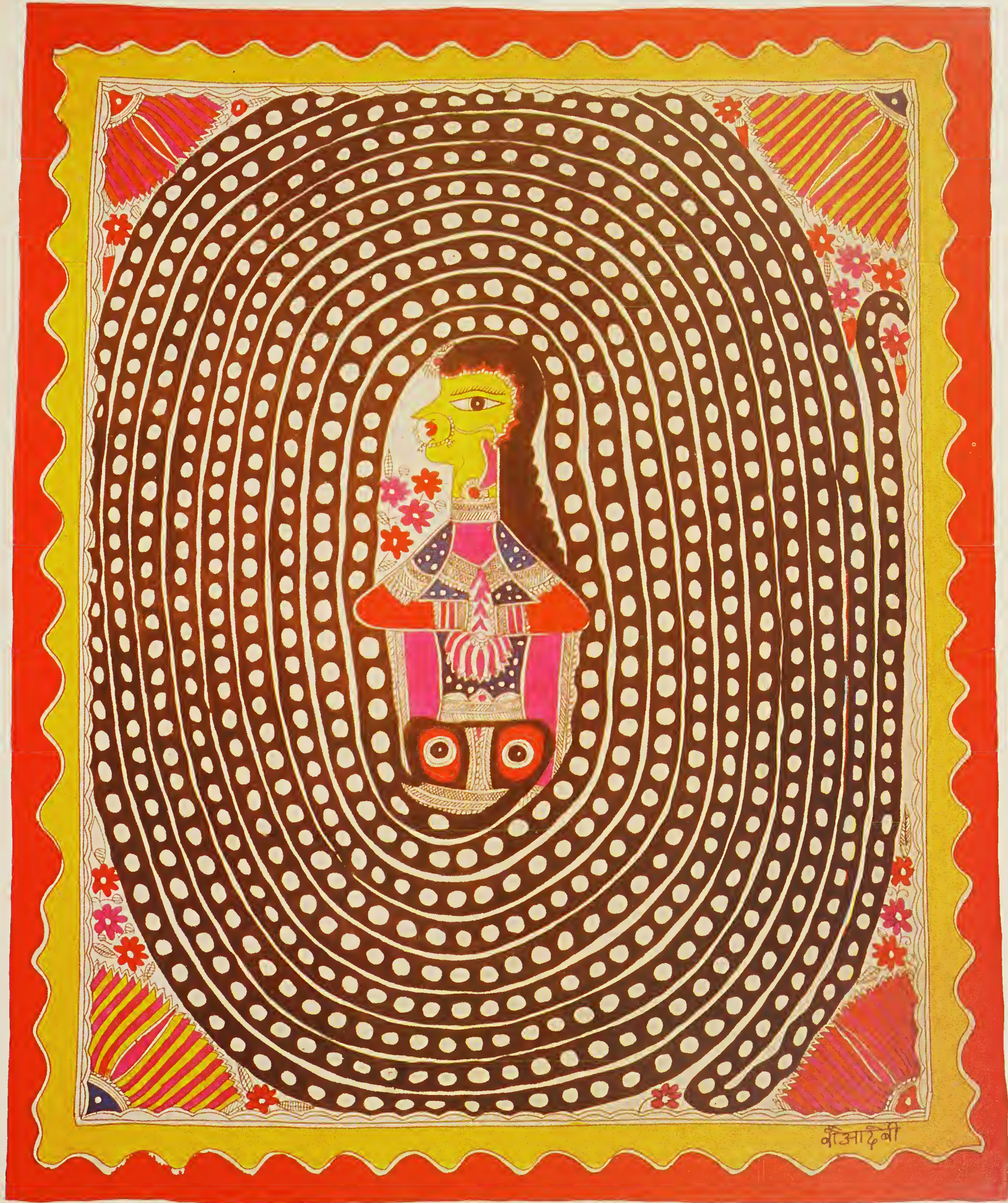


**303** Kali.  
Wall painting executed by women. Madhubani,  
Bihar.

**304** Wall painting of fishes and birds,  
executed on the occasion of a feast day by women.  
Madhubani, Bihar.

**305** Snake goddess.  
Painting executed by women on paper.  
Madhubani, Bihar.





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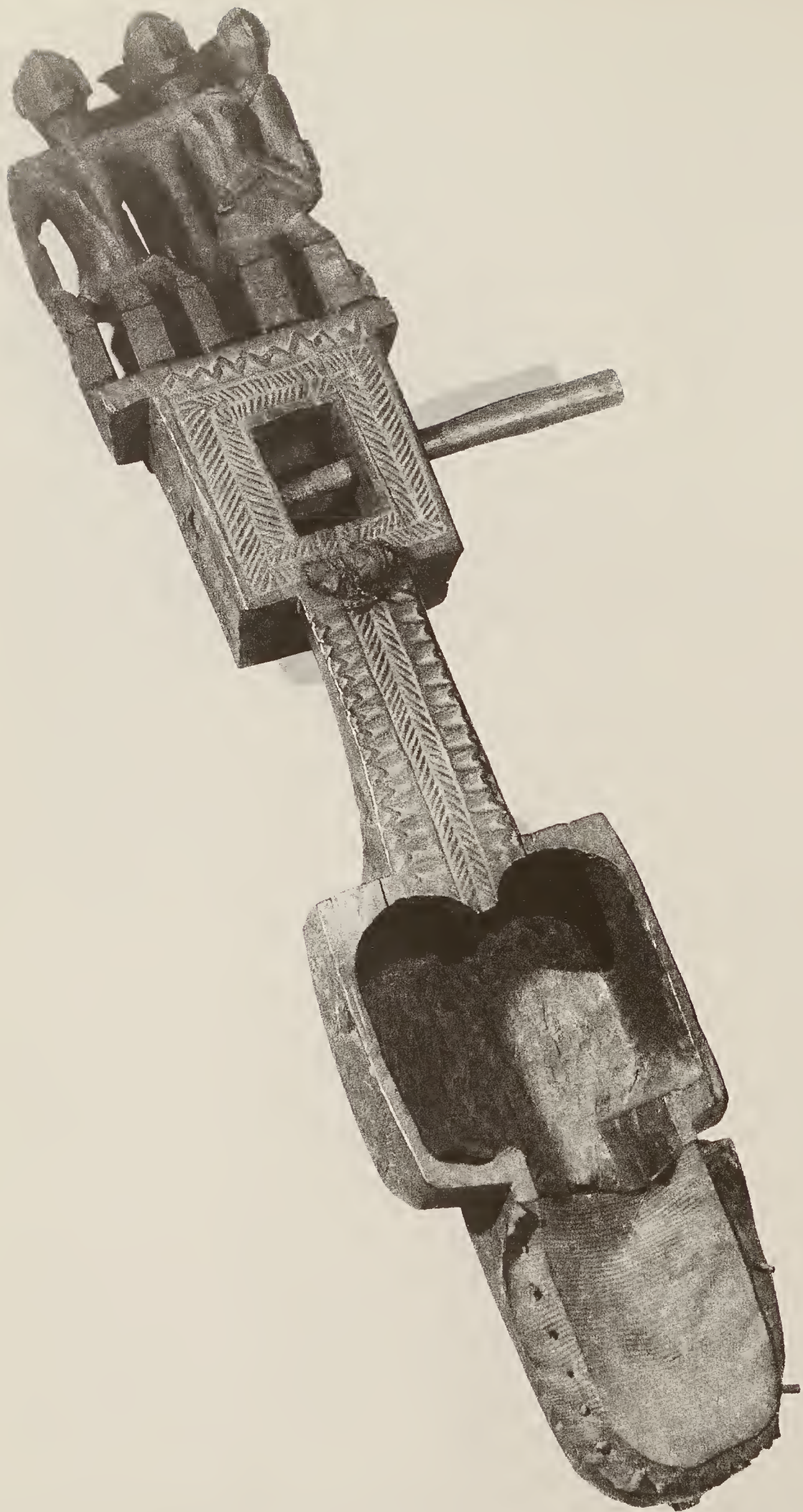




306 Recumbent cow.  
Copper vessel. Uttar Pradesh.

307 Aripan.  
Festive floor painting. Bihar.





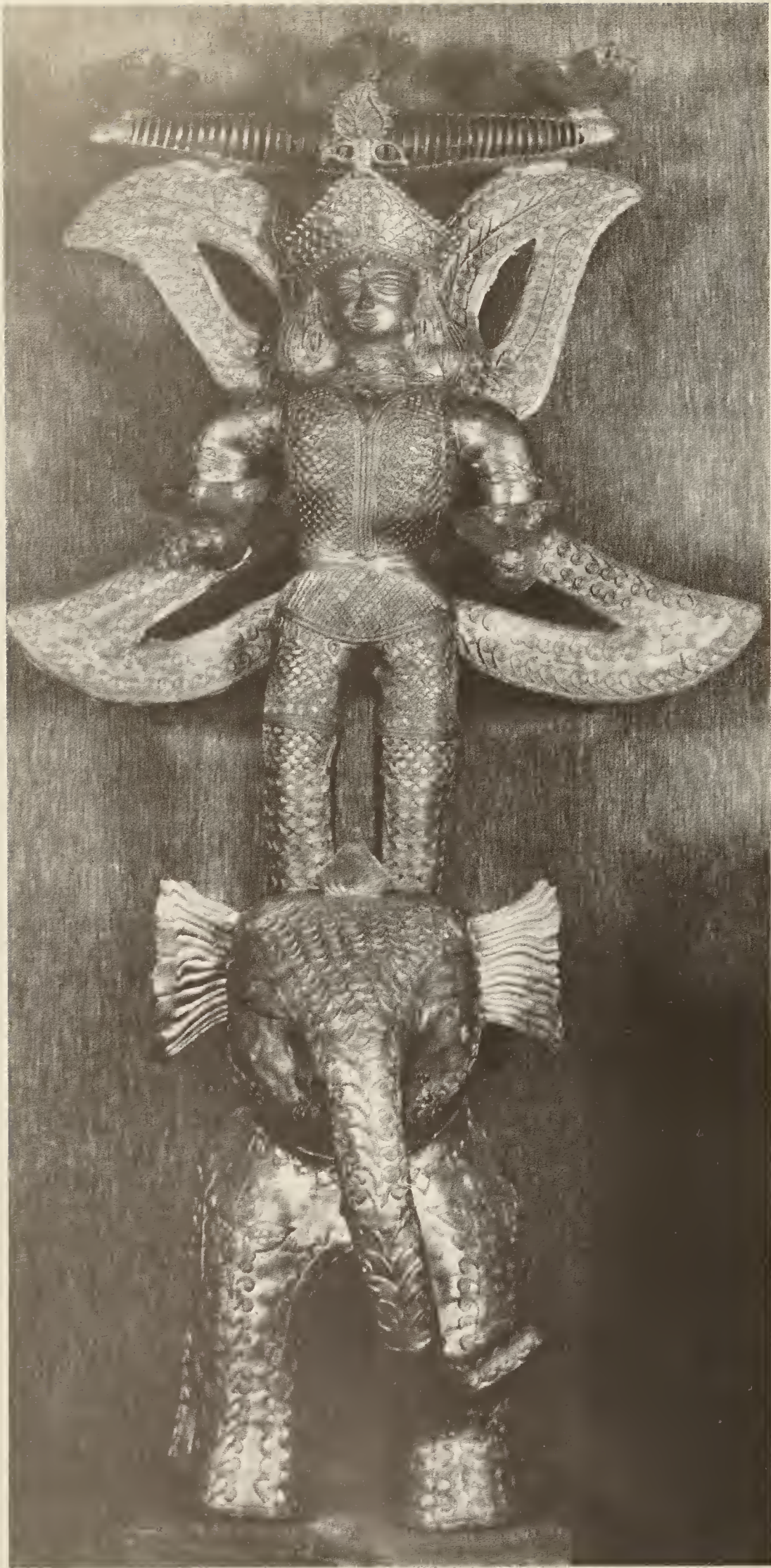
308 Banam. Santal musical instrument with decorative carvings. Wood. Bihar.





309/310 Santal nuptial litter with decorative carvings, and detail of same. Bihar.







application of early folk art. First in Bengal and then in other parts of India, this pictorial repertory of folk art has been brought together to form what might be described as a pattern-book, a primer, for general use in fields such as textile design and book ornamentation, and also to serve as a stimulus to original artistic creation. Thus traditional folk art is employed to breathe life into industrial mass production, though it need hardly be said that we can no more attempt to interpret its content in terms of its original function than we can continue to describe it as women's art. This process, which is currently taking place, is, perhaps, a concrete example of the way in which a traditional repertory of forms and images adapts itself to new conditions and thus undergoes further development. Such a process may, indeed, have occurred on previous occasions, but under different circumstances, throughout the millennia of India's art history.

Although the branch of folk art we are about to discuss cannot properly be described painting, it may, broadly speaking, be considered in association with the latter, since both belong to the sphere of two-dimensional art. The articles concerned are known as *kanthas* and were made exclusively by Bengali women in their homes. They could almost be described as textile paintings were it not for the fact that the stuffs are not actually painted, but rather are decorated in polychrome with textile materials in the form of thread and rags. Worn-out garments are cut up and those parts that are still in relatively good condition are sewn together and richly embellished with figurative designs in simple needlework to produce a freehand compo-

sition that is frequently as complex as it is ambitious. A work of this kind could be completed by one woman in about six months. However, a *kantha* might be so richly embroidered as to occupy the female members of a family for the space of three generations.<sup>75</sup>

The word *kantha*, freely translated, means patchwork embroidery. In many cases the ground consists of remnants of white cotton saris, while the threads used for the embroidery are picked out from old materials, as often as not the coloured borders of saris. The thread is carried over the surface in small stitches to produce a series of dotted lines. To these are added, from the reverse side, longer floats which are mostly used as decorative elements and for filling in the bodies of the figures. The surface of the material is so densely covered with stitching as to turn these remnants into what amounts to a completely new, relatively thick and sturdy article. Stella Kramrisch, who has made an exhaustive study of the subject, also draws attention to the ancient tradition behind these embroideries and cites as an example the monastic robes of the Buddha, alluded to in early texts as *sanghati* which, translated literally, means "put together". At one time the *kanthas* were never traded or sold. They served many purposes, being used, for instance, as a warm body wrap, quilt or bedcover (*sujni*) and, on a smaller scale, as handkerchiefs (*rumals*), book covers (*baytons*) or comb cases (*arshilatas*). Most of these were made as presents for members of the women's families. The compositions and individual motifs are of the greatest interest and in some cases are closely related to those of the *alponas*. Quite often the composition as a whole may display a certain symmetry, though not of a very strict kind, in which the centre is accentuated by a lotus flower, for instance, and the four corners by trees or other vegetable

mòtifs. Yet such an arrangement is never allowed to interfere with the artist's freedom in handling her materials, nor does it result in any rigidity of the figural composition. In no instance does any one figurative motif correspond even approximately to its equivalent. Though the whole composition may be taken in at a glance, the general impression is one of shimmering colour thanks to the multiplicity of figures and incidental motifs. Every detail testifies to the imagination and creative powers of these simple countrywomen who, in their *kanthas*, translate into pictures their world, their environment and their time-honoured religious beliefs, the result being that each individual element has its own significance and conveys its own message.

From the figurative point of view the range of the *kanthas* is far wider than that of the *alponas*. The individuality of style and subject matter that characterizes each of these embroideries has militated against any form of modern industrial exploitation. As compared with the richly figured cloths of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—nothing of earlier date has survived—the *kanthas* produced today look sadly depleted, being largely restricted to embellishment of a purely ornamental nature. In this way they tend to approximate ever more closely to embroideries made in other parts of India and to lose their magical originality, the richness of an unsophisticated individualism expressed within the limits prescribed by tradition. Thus, although this branch of folk art is still practised today, it does in fact already belong to the past.

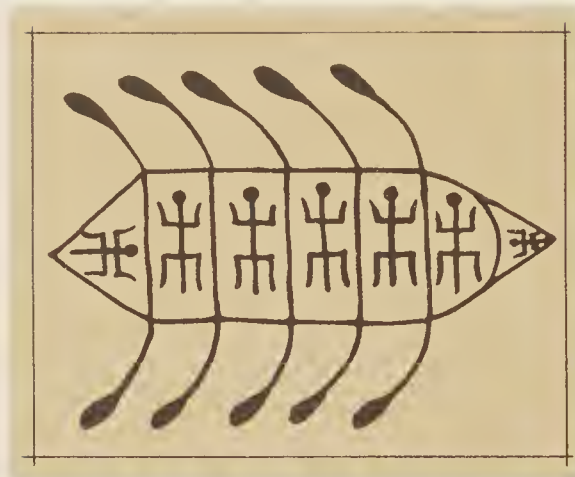
Little trace now remains in Bengal of another form of folk art which is known to have been practised there, namely domestic wall painting. In Bihar, on the other hand, which lies immediately to the west, there is a large area in which the painting of both walls and floors still continues.

[75] KRAMRISCH, S., "Kanthā", in: *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, VII, 1939, pp. 141–167.

311 Dhokra elephant with rider.  
Bengal.

312 Dhokra horse. Bankura,  
Bengal.





These pictures, produced in north Bihar and previously known as *mithila* paintings, are now subsumed under the term Madhubani art (Madhubani being a subdivision of Darbhanga district). They have come to be regarded as representative of Indian folk art generally, and are eagerly sought after by art lovers. In response to this growing demand for articles of a handy and readily transportable nature, the artists have ceased to confine themselves to wall paintings and have begun to produce pictures executed on paper.

The growing popularity of Madhubani art has been fostered by a number of writings, the most notable being the publications, photographs and educational films of E. Moser-Schmitt, whose findings are the result of a first-hand study of themes, techniques and social backgrounds.<sup>76</sup> Some of these Madhubani artists are now known by name and have been honoured by the Indian government.

According to earlier accounts, the paintings were actually executed by Brahmin and Kayashtha women who, by reason of their caste, constituted a socially respected minority in the villages of Bihar. Yet it should not be forgotten that women, particularly those belonging to relatively high and conservative castes, were by no means on an equal footing with their menfolk. Indeed, the latter regarded all feminine activity as the mere performance of a duty, regardless of any possible artistic merit.

This form of painting remained unappreciated in any wider sense until the seventies, when, with the arrival of art dealers, the villagers were presented with a new and previously undreamed-of source of income. Indeed, even the men are said to have asked themselves whether they might not prove equally competent as artists. Since that time further exhaustive investigations have revealed that Harijan women, that is to say women of the lowest social caste, also decorate the walls of their huts with paintings which, however, differ slightly as regards style and content from the works mentioned above.

There are various ways in which distinctions may be drawn between the different categories of Madhubani painting. First, we have the actual wall paintings as opposed to the preliminary sketches which were originally done on paper as an aide-mémoire rather than as a prototype to be faithfully copied. These sketches were not intended

for sale and were preserved in the home by the family to be handed down from mother to daughter.

Again, the specific function, and hence also the themes, of these paintings are material to any investigation of the subject. Family events, such as the laying on of the sacred thread by the sons of Brahmin families, might be no less the occasion for the painting of certain rooms than might, say, this or that phase of the nuptial ceremony in the bride's house, the actual wedding itself, and, indeed, the formal consummation of the marriage ties. The decoration of particular rooms was also carried out preparatory to important feast days and events such as the renewal of the household shrine. Public festivals as well as the occurrence of family celebrations called for the decoration of passages and of the room in which the household deity was worshipped. A special apartment, the *kohbar* or nuptial chamber, was set aside specifically for the wedding ceremony. On certain occasions the floor would also be painted, when the decoration would serve much the same purpose as the *alponas* in Bengal.<sup>77</sup>

A distinction may also be drawn between the paintings of Brahmin women who favoured a freer type of composition and those of Kyashtha women in whose wall paintings colour played a less important role than did line-drawing and the enclosure of individual scenes in well-defined frames.<sup>78</sup>

It should further be noted that the earlier Madhubani paintings ("earlier" being of

[76] MOSER-SCHMITT, E., *Filmdokumente, Publikationen zu wissenschaftlichen Filmen*, Institut für den wissenschaftlichen Film, Göttingen, Sektion Ethnologie, 8, 37-50, 1978.

[77] ARCHER, M., *Indian Popular Painting*, London, 1977, pp. 85 ff.

[78] ARCHER, M., *Indian Popular Painting*, London, 1977, p. 88.

313 Vehicle for the gods.

Alpona floor painting executed by Bengali women.

314 Ritual floor painting (alpona) of a ship, executed for travellers by Bengali women.





course a relative term when used of a genre whose known history goes back no more than a few decades), in other words, the paintings collected by, amongst others, William Archer long before the great host of amateurs arrived upon the scene, are of far better quality than the more hastily produced articles of today which cover, for the most part, a far wider range of themes. Nevertheless these more recent productions may continue to rank as genuine folk art, always providing they are executed by the village women themselves in accordance with principles deriving from the tradition of their domestic handicraft.

**315** The goddess Subachani or duck mother.  
Alpona floor painting executed by Bengali women.

**316** Marriage ritual.  
Alpona floor painting executed by Bengali women.

Shiva and Parvati, Radha and Krishna, in fact all the deities of the Hindu pantheon and of the rural local religions, are to be found in Madhubani art, though the representations are wholly free of the constraints imposed by the canons of official-orthodox art.

Among the subjects which were favoured by these women painters are the one-eyed bride surrounded by fishes and other auspicious symbols, the bridegroom still wearing his nuptial crown, hunting and ploughing scenes, animals, trees and many other aspects of rural life. At the same time neither composition, the use of colour, nor the mode of representation are of very much help when it comes to distinguishing between sacred and profane figures. Rather, these are identifiable from their dress, their own particular attributes and the general context of the scene.

The colours, primarily red, yellow, blue and green, were at one time collected and prepared by the women themselves, their raw materials being earth, vegetable and mineral substances and powdered charcoal. Today, however, the pictures on paper are done for the most part in ready-made colours bought in the bazaar which makes for a richer palette, in much the same way as commercial demand has broadened the range of subjects.

By observing the painters at work, it has been discovered that they proceed along additive lines, in other words, add one detail to another without visualizing beforehand what the general effect will be, an effect that is therefore achieved only by degrees. Not till the whole is complete are the eyes painted in. Though this would not in fact appear to be a ceremonial practice, as it is in the case of religious statues, the special treatment of the eyes, as we have already noted in the necromantic pictures of the *jadupatuas*, is evidently a tradition that goes

back a very long way. In terms of magic, it is the eye which imbues the figure with life and must therefore be accentuated. It would be difficult to overrate the importance of the eye, either in the Madhubani paintings or in Indian folk art as a whole, where it is either disproportionately enlarged or formally accentuated.

So far as the historical development of Indian folk art is concerned, the works produced in their homes by the women of north Bihar may, in a sense, be regarded as a continuation of the old tradition of tribal painting as already encountered in central India and amongst the Bhils. At the same time, account must be taken of social upheavals and the changes these have wrought in manners, customs and beliefs. While artistic activity is no longer governed by ancient magical or thaumaturgic concepts, these have not by any means been completely abandoned. Vestiges of traditional thought are still concealed beneath a domestic ritual that is based on the material prosperity of the extended family. Anxieties regarding survival and shelter have been overlaid by a growing preoccupation with prosperity that is no longer directed towards preserving



**317** Symbols of the household deity in the form of various footprints.  
Alpona floor painting executed by Bengali women.





wealth but rather towards amassing it. Accordingly, attempts are made to enlist the aid of the gods, or, as it were, to bribe them and thus secure their support in attaining goals of an increasingly ambitious nature. What we have here are, to a great extent, sincere and profound religious beliefs which are not generalized or depersonalized, as they are in the majority of high religions. Rather, they are in very large measure self-oriented and, by extension, family-oriented, so that any connections which may appear to exist between those beliefs and the concerns of the high religions are liable to be of a more or less superficial kind. For, while this branch of private domestic

art may pay lip-service to the "establishment", it is in fact an independent manifestation based on traditions of its own, and as such constitutes a parallel to the state-dominated art of orthodox religion. If, then, we seek to evaluate this form of art practised by non-professional women painters as a manifestation in its own right, we find that, within the relatively isolated context of village art as a whole, it may be equated with the art of the great temple complexes. Still in the region under discussion, but in a very different type of landscape, namely Kumaon, the mountainous country near the eastern border of Uttar Pradesh, we again encounter women artists, this time engaged

in a far wider range of activities.<sup>79</sup> For besides wall and floor decoration, they would also appear to have made *pat*-painting, not to say the production of clay figurines, their exclusive province, although elsewhere the two latter crafts were confined to men. The above arts are known, according to locality, as *aipana*, *bar-boond*, *patha* and *dikara*. A local emphasis on repeat patterns, often of a very complex nature and inspired by textiles and basketry, goes hand in hand with a predilection for remarkably dense figurative paintings whose borders are decorated with abstract geometrical forms and subsidiary motifs which, in floor designs, also include the human figure. Despite the existence of such local peculiarities, there are nevertheless a great many points of correspondence between these pictures and the women's paintings we have encountered elsewhere in India. In both cases we find the same unsophisticated purport and ambience, the same use of pictographic signs deriving from an age-old tradition and, above all, the same highly imaginative and completely unconventional mode of representation. The repeat patterns include some of the motifs already met with in early rock painting and in Harappan art, notably bands of crosses and swastikas, as also overall patterns including circles intersecting to produce a floral design. In Kumaon as elsewhere the repertory of the non-professional women painters is dominated by the deities of the Hindu pantheon who, in the figurative representations, are shown surrounded by plants and animals in accordance with the secularized conventions already familiar to us.

[79] UPRETI, N. R., "Folk Art of Kumaon", in: *Census of India*, 1961, I. Delhi, 1969.

[80] MOSER-SCHMITT, E., *Filmdokumente, Publikationen zu wissenschaftlichen Filmen*, Institut für den wissenschaftlichen Film, Göttingen, Sektion Ethnologie, 8, 47, 1978, Plates 2-5.





A particular form of wall decoration, also executed by women, consists in a clay rendering which, while still malleable, is worked to produce an overall effect

achieved by combining two- and three-dimensional forms with the emphasis on the former. In some respects the finished article is not unreminiscent of the wood carvings

encountered in the tribal sphere. This form of plastering was practised by the Harijan women of Madhubani district in Bihar, to whom allusion has already been made.<sup>80</sup>

319 Kantha embroidery executed by a Bengali woman, approx. 3 m square.



Their relatively modest repertory is confined to a few motifs such as plants and animals, geometrized symbols and, occasionally, human figures depicted in very crude outline. While on the subject of wall reliefs, we would draw attention to a very striking form of female domestic art, examples of which

are to be seen, not only in the vicinity of Delhi, but also in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and the Punjab, not to mention Rajasthan.<sup>81</sup> In these reliefs, the wall is used as a ground for appliqué work. Having been rendered with cow dung, the surface is decorated with scraps of cloth and paper, to which shells, small lumps of clay and the like

are added to produce a figurative design. These decorations, done for a particular festive occasion on an outside wall and calling for the use of very simple and exceed-

[81] ROBINS, B. D., and BUSSABERGER, R. F., "Folk Images of the Sanjhi Devi", in: *Artibus Asiae*, XXXVI, 4, 1974, pp. 283-306.



320 Detail of a kantha embroidery. Bengal.

321 Heavily stylized temple car. Kantha embroidery. Bengal.







ingly fragile materials, are necessarily ephemeral. They portray only one central figure, namely the goddess Sanjhi, and are therefore commonly known as Sanjhi wall reliefs. This deity is believed to be a local version of the great goddess Hoi whom we have already encountered in Pahari folk art. In the Sanjhi wall reliefs, however, the goddess assumes a form very different from that of the Pahari deity. Whereas the latter is given a rectangular, house-shaped outline, the figure of Sanjhi, though it is no less schematized, is clearly based on the triangle, and is presented in crude outline in a rigorously frontal pose with arms partially upraised. The artistic interest of the work lies in the abundance of individual elements used to fill in the main outline. These are applied in the manner described above and consist of cut-outs, mainly in the form of stars, but also of rings and somewhat distorted triangular, rectangular and circular motifs. The result is a shimmering, star-strewn image of the goddess, almost overwhelming in its simplicity and naïveté. Highly ephemeral works such as these are difficult to document and, like many other products in the field of folk art, are not of a kind that can be preserved by inclusion in public or private collections. Latterly, representations of Sanjhi, either painted on paper or in the form of collages after the manner of the wall decorations, have been appearing in the bazaars. However, the configuration of the deity in these representations is more akin to that of the goddess Hoi, down to the inclusion of other figures by way of an added attraction. Here, before our very eyes, the original figure of the goddess Sanjhi, worshipped as inducing fecundity, undergoes a change, a process of adaption and integration such as must have taken place on many previous occasions in the long history of Indian folk art.



322 Veiled bride.  
Painting on paper by a non-professional woman artist.  
Madhubani, Bihar, early 20th century.



The style and techniques characteristic of the Sanjhi wall reliefs must at one time have been very widespread in Indian folk art, as may also be deduced from the textile products of Saurashtra into which decoration in the shape of glass or mica fragments is inserted. But the production of ephemera is also a feature of folk art everywhere in India, and their documentation presents similar difficulties. Up till now, however, these particular forms of folk art have been all too rarely observed, nor for the most part have they been carefully researched or recorded in pictures. Here we shall do no more than touch on one or two examples such as, for instance, the gigantic groups seen during the Dussehra festival in Delhi, and the clay-and-straw images of the goddess Sitala in rural Bengal. These short-lived creations are not necessarily always the work of non-professionals, whether male or female, for in the larger cities, on occasions such as the Durga-Puja in Bengal and the Ganesha-Puja in Bombay, when such articles are greatly in demand, they are produced by professional craftsmen. Nevertheless, no study of Indian folk art can dispense with a consideration of these artefacts, constituting as they do a form of mass production aimed at satisfying what is a momentary requirement on the part of broad sections of the population.

Having now passed well beyond the sphere of painting and two-dimensional art, we shall proceed to consider sculpture, a branch which, in the region under discussion—a region that saw the birth of the classical tradition in art—is, it need hardly be said, also of considerable importance to folk art. Both Bihar and Bengal are the home of professional village craftsmen specializing in this art. The particular technique employed in the manufacture of small sculptures, the so-called Dhokra technique, is not only more widespread here than anywhere



else, but may well have originated in the region. We have already encountered it in central India, notably in Orissa, the immediate neighbour of Bengal. In Bihar the most important centres of production are Lowadih and Ranchi and, in Bengal, Rampur and Bankura.

Certain indications as to the age of the Dhokra technique may be found in Darbhanga district in Bihar. For here a form of traditional folk art has survived which may in some sense be regarded as constituting a kind of model for Dhokra metal sculptures.

The objects and figures which used to be, and still are, manufactured in this area are fashioned out of coloured grasses, in particular a species known as *sikki*, which is gold in colour and is employed in the manufacture of birds, elephants and other animals as well as of human figures. These “basketry sculptures”, “the work of non-professional village craftswomen, were at one time made as gifts for members of the family. The material was ready to hand and cost little if anything. Yet the work was very demanding in terms both of application and

323 Sarasvati, goddess of language and learning.  
Preliminary sketch by Mahasundara Devi,  
a non-professional woman artist of Madhubani, Bihar.



of skill, qualities also met with among women engaged in non-professional handicrafts elsewhere, as we have already seen in the case of the laboriously produced *kanthas*. Latterly, the promotional activities of the All India Handicrafts Board have introduced a professional and commercial element into what used to be a purely private and amateur sphere of production. One of the more unexpected consequences is that religious themes have been grafted on to what was once a purely secular repertory. For instance, we now encounter figures, either singly or in groups, drawn from episodes in the Krishna legend.

These objects made of woven grass have a characteristic surface which, with its linear discontinuity, alternation of light and shade, and relievo effect, reveals features that are also plainly discernible in the surface treatment of the Dhokra sculptures. Hence it has been suggested, no doubt with some reason, that the otherwise inexplicable and unwonted application to metal sculpture of a technique proper to basketry may, in fact, have been derived from that craft, the more so since it can be shown that examples of *sikki* work are to be found in the immediate vicinity of Dhokra production centres.

In the Dhokra technique, as in that of basketry, the core receives an outside coating in the shape of strips to which the finishing touches are given. The clay form for metal casting is produced in two separate operations, as is the basketry figure, of which the core is fashioned out of coarse monsoon grass. This corresponds to the roughly modelled clay core in metal casting. The second operation involves the creation of the surface pattern. At this point the core is overlaid with *sikki* grass in the case of basketry, and with strips of malleable wax or wax substitute in the case of metal sculpture. No further comparisons can, of course, be



324 Lakshmi.

Aipana floor painting executed by women.  
Kumaon, Uttar Pradesh.

325 Durga Puja.

Patha painting executed by women.  
Kumaon, Uttar Pradesh.



drawn when it comes to the casting processes.

The Bengali craftsmen of Rampur in Bankura district belong to the Kainkuya branch of the Mal caste, another branch of which, the Sanakar-Mal, were painters by profession. It would seem that the term "Dhokra" was originally used of itinerant blacksmiths who, however, have long since become sedentary and are held to be an exceedingly low caste.

The Dhokra craftsmen of Bengal produce not only small zoomorphic figures, in particular horses and elephants either with or without riders, but also images of sundry deities and items such as small metal caskets, the surface decoration of which is even more strongly reminiscent of basketry than that of the figures.

The two principal materials employed by these metal casters are brass, sometimes known as yellow metal, an alloy of five parts

copper to two of zinc, and what is known as *kansa* or bell-metal, a mixture of copper and zinc in the proportion of seven to two. Both the subject matter of the small sculptures—mostly local deities of village, if not tribal, type—and the low caste of the smiths and of the customers they supply, would seem to justify the conclusion that metal work in Bengal and Bihar dates back to a very early period. The links with central India are unmistakable and we must therefore



326 Krishna raises Govardhana Mountain.  
Patha painting executed by women. Kumaon,  
Uttar Pradesh.









assume that Dhokra art was originally practised and disseminated by a group of smiths belonging to a non-sedentary Indian tribe. Here again the characteristics of Hindu art, though strongly in evidence today, are of secondary importance, and it is the magical significance of these small sculptures which must be regarded as their primary function. Allusion has already been made to the traditional terracotta figurines produced in the villages of the region presently under discussion. Today the potter's craft, including the manufacture of sculptures in kiln- or sun-baked clay, is still widely practised in the villages of northern India. In almost every village the visitor will come upon rubbish dumps on which lie small, cheaply made clay figures which have once served as votive offerings, either in the home or for local pilgrims visiting the simple village shrines. Although the potter's wheel has been known in northern India for several thousand years, it is seldom if ever used in the manufacture of figurines, while even pots are sometimes modelled rather than thrown.

In Bengal, handmade terracottas are manufactured both by the *kamars* or professional potters, and by women. On the other hand, the production of moulded figurines, of which there are very few, is the sole province of the caste potters who make use of age-old techniques. Here too we may detect a close link with metal casting.

The small clay figures are often described as toys and it is, of course, true that in India, as everywhere else, town and village children play with dolls and toy animals. Yet according to Bengali tradition it would seem that this particular kind of toy is made of wood and usually painted. Cheaply made but nevertheless highly idiosyncratic female figures were fashioned from pieces of board precisely for this purpose and so plain and simple were they that they might have been

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327 Decorative relief  
executed by non-professional Harijan women.  
Jitvapur, Bihar.



cut out and painted by the children themselves. However, the same cannot be said of the small clay and metal sculptures.<sup>82</sup> In the case of all these figures, what is of prime importance is their magical significance and ritual application. This does not, of course, preclude the possibility of their having been given to children to play with, once they were no longer required for magical purposes and had become ritually unclean. Though small terracotta sculpture has a long history which began with the archaic village cultures, there is absolutely no evidence to show that such articles have ever been specifically produced to meet the needs of children. Were we to apply a modern yardstick to many of these figures and dismiss them as "primitive" purely on the grounds of their outward simplicity, we should be guilty not only of an arrogant terminological inaccuracy, but also of an inadmissible extrapolation from the customs and circumstances of our own day.

Archaeological discoveries in Bengal have shown that the tradition of terracotta production is a very ancient one. Since the thirties excavations of sites at Bangarh, Chandra-Ketugarh and Tamralipti (present-day Tamluk) have brought to light finds which have been dated by the stratigraphic method and which, at a conservative estimate, go back as far as the Maurya period. The terracottas in question, unlike those mistakenly interpreted as toys, do not belong solely to the so-called "timeless" category, for they also comprise very painstakingly executed figures which are found throughout northern India in a sequence corresponding to that of the Maurya, Shunga, Kushana and Gupta dynasties. These figures bear witness to an ancient tradition, but at the same time they also raise the question as to whether they qualify for inclusion in the category of true folk art. That this question should be answered in

the affirmative would seem to be indicated by the factors just mentioned, namely the origins of the technique in archaic village cultures, and the "timelessness" or continuous production throughout all periods of what are in effect extremely simple types. Nevertheless, the small terracottas and the almost life-size individual figures produced in northern India in historical times also belong within the context of the development of classical art. There can be little or no doubt that many of these sculptures were made to the order of the privileged urban classes, or for use in princely courts. But the subject takes on a wholly different complexion when it comes to powerful patrons of religious persuasion. The early texts provide unequivocal evidence that Brahmanic orthodoxy reprehended the use of clay in the manufacture of religious images on the grounds that it was unclean, while the firing process was regarded as even more obnoxious because of its undesirable magical connotations. For this reason terracotta was considered ritually unclean, being admissible only when the statues were intended for use in invocations calculated to inflict damage on an enemy.

In view of the attitude adopted by Brahmanic orthodoxy in Bengal, it is all the more surprising that the principal material used in the construction of what is an extremely fine group of religious buildings should have been fired clay. Known as terracotta temples, these have latterly been accorded an honourable if somewhat peripheral place in the history of Indian art. They owe this distinction not only to their technical peculiarities and social function, but also to the still unresolved debate, already referred to above, as to whether or not they are clean in the ritual sense and whether they admit of vindication on religious grounds. They might equally well be described as an heretical and deviant

form of orthodox ecclesiastical art or as a sublimated form of rural folk art. It is in this latter capacity that they call for consideration in our discussion of Indian folk art as a whole and we therefore proposed to examine them in somewhat greater detail.

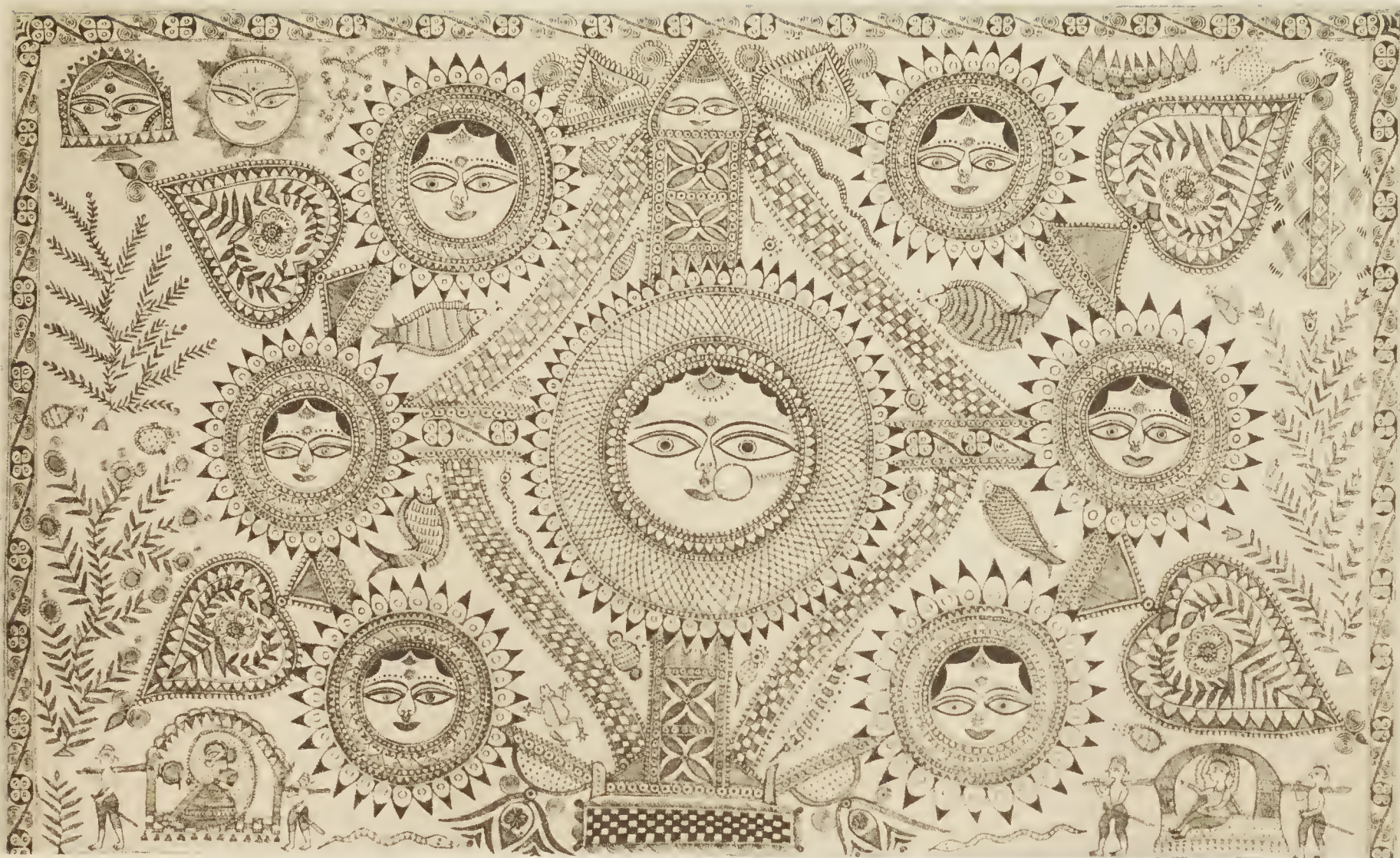
On historical grounds the temples, like early Bengali art in general, will be considered as an entity, although recent political events have meant that some now stand on Bengali soil and some on that of Bangla Desh. Many are dated by their inscriptions. Made at the behest of the patron who commissioned the building, such inscriptions enable us to ascertain that this type of temple architecture was in its heyday between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, in other words, during the period of internecine strife between native dynasties and that of colonial rule following their defeat by the British. It may safely be assumed that these political circumstances were of crucial importance in determining the above-mentioned characteristics which are peculiar to the terracotta temples of Bengal.

So far as their outward appearance is concerned, these village temples do not really belong to the tradition of Indian ecclesiastical architecture, being more reminiscent of the Bengali farmhouse with its covering of straw and bamboo. Their curving roofs, like the caps of mushrooms, overhang the outside walls. The temples are classified in accordance with the number of superimposed roofs and of the towers by which the latter are crowned.<sup>83</sup> If, then, the building as such is seen as the product of the local village tradition, a connection with folk art is estab-

[82] KRAMRISCH, S., "Indian Terracottas", in: *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, 1939, pp. 93 ff.

[83] DAY, M., *Birbhum Terracottas*, Lalit Kala Akademi, Delhi, 1959; GANGOLY, O. C., *Indian Terracotta Art* (Ed. A. GOSWAMI), Calcutta, 1959.





lished if only by reason of its general mode of construction.

The exterior of these buildings is distinguished, not only by their architecture—in itself remarkable enough—but also and above all by the wealth of ornamentation. The outer surfaces of the temple walls are covered with terracotta reliefs articulated with a clarity that is in keeping with the tectonic nature of the structure as a whole. Owing to their density and the play of light, these reliefs, when viewed from afar, resemble a painting while, at the same time, the individual representations merge into the background to create an impression of a single ornamental expanse.

Yet in reality the decoration consists in juxtaposed and superimposed rectangular panels of terracotta reliefs inserted in the surface of the walls. Here we find figurative scenes of all descriptions in which religious themes predominate, but not by any means to the exclusion of secular subjects, usually connected with aspects of village or small-town life. These compositions display considerable variety: ornamental, vegetable and animal motifs are used in conjunction with depictions of, say, a trading caravan, a heavily manned ship, a group of dancers or musicians, or a trial of arms, while peaceful, everyday occupations also have their place—a village beauty combing her hair of

a morning, or a middle class woman leaning out of her window. Occasionally, individual reliefs are combined to form larger groups depicting scenes from the epic poems, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, or from mythological cycles in which Durga, a deity greatly revered in Bengal, plays a prominent role. Here and there on the temple walls we may find a European portrayed in a manner that sometimes verges on caricature. Taken all in all, the repertory encountered in these terracotta temples is not unlike that of the *pat*-painters whom we have already discussed.

The terracotta temples of Bengal, and their ornamentation in particular, may, in our



opinion, be regarded as representative of a transitional stage in the more recent history of Indian civilization and should therefore be seen as belonging to the same phase as the wood carvings on the outside walls of Gujarati houses, although the function of the latter may have been of a different kind. That phase, which patently influenced the course taken by artistic developments, was determined by the social changes following the arrival of the colonial powers and of the British in particular. The absolute sovereignty of the native rulers was gradually whittled away, the result being an inevitable diminution both of their concern and of their ability to promote indigenous art, in as much as this represented an autonomous tradition. In this, as in other respects, they increasingly sought to conform to the model presented by the men who now reigned supreme—those minions of the British crown, the military, civilians and businessmen. This change of taste on the part of their patrons necessarily influenced those Indian artists whose living depended on their falling in with the new requirements.

At the same time small sections of the native population gained in prosperity and influence, first as the faithful servants of their colonial masters and then, increasingly, with the attainment of some measure of independence, as their co-administrators. The wealth of these new urban classes resulted in a form of artistic ostentation that was at once imitative and expressive of a shame-faced pride in tradition. They were served, not by the former court craftsmen, but by other groups of indigenous artists who, because drawn from the villages, were much more deeply committed to the folk art tradition.

This period represents a transitional phase in that it saw, firstly, the breaking down of the long-established social norms preserved

within the caste system, secondly, the attempt by the colonial rulers to impose upon the supposedly untutored Indian craftsmen the teaching of artists imported from Europe specifically for that purpose and, thirdly, and more recently, competition among craftsmen for custom, including even that of the poorest of the poor among the pilgrims. When discussing the artistic products of this period in earlier chapters, we have already noted the extreme adaptability of the Indian artist who, however, is always on the look-out for new fields offering continuity in the deployment of his traditional skills.

The terracotta art of Bengal, and in particular the temple reliefs alluded to above, should be considered in this context. Priestly orthodoxy, hitherto omnipotent, no longer went unchallenged, for it now found itself circumvented by religious sectarians and by men of reformist stamp. Indeed, as in the case of the *pat*-painters, what we have here are the first glimmerings of a national resistance movement, the members of which were drawn, not so much from the ranks of the traditional craftsmen's castes as from the new, largely urban class, then in process of formation, of free-lance artists. Some of these men adopted and increased the scope of the social criticism we have already noted among the *pat*-painters. A typical representative of these new aspirations is Gaganendranath Tagore who, like his brother Abanindranath, is a nephew of the great Rabindranath Tagore.

From the inscriptions on the village temples we learn the names of their patrons and donors. For the most part these were *zamindars*, the new, well-to-do landowners, but their ranks also included higher caste Brahmans and Kayashthas, and nouveau riche tradesmen such as jewellers, distillers and wine merchants. Towards the end of the nineteenth century there still existed well-

organized craftsmen's guilds who formed themselves into gangs capable of executing commissions for the erection of village temples.

In accordance with a time-honoured Indian custom, these artisans worked under the supervision of a master-builder. On being awarded a contract, the master-builder was given the necessary funds to buy the building materials and pay his fellow workers. These gangs were made up of some twelve to fifteen specialist craftsmen who did not necessarily all come from the same place. Led by the master-builder, they moved from village to village, wherever work was offering and there set up their lodge. First of all various detailed designs for the building of the temple were submitted to the patron who chose the one he thought most suitable for the task. Thereupon the specialist craftsmen went in search of the best clays, preferably those in beds conveniently close to the site.

The utmost care was taken in the preparation of the figurative and ornamental terracotta surface decoration in accordance with the designs of the master-builder who supervised the entire process. The sun-baked relief was pressed into clay, after which the mould thus formed was fired in a kiln. An impression was then taken from the mould and sun-baked, at which stage corrections could be made and fine detail added. Not until this had been done was the terracotta panel actually fired preparatory to being affixed to the building.

Exposed as they were to the effects of the sun and of the monsoon rains, the life of these terracotta reliefs adorning the village temples was necessarily limited. Today most of them have suffered severe damage

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[84] GUPTA, M., "Mask-makers of Bagmundi", in: *The Hindustan Standard, Puja Annual* 1964, pp. 14 ff.



or been destroyed. In some cases whole walls, indeed entire buildings, have been stripped of their terracotta panels which have either been stolen, taken away as mementoes or sold by the owner of the private land on which the majority of these temples were built. Hence many such reliefs are to be found in private and public collections, almost always singly and with no specific information as to their provenance. It is a branch of folk art which calls for an exhaustive study, yet the prospects for such a work are becoming increasingly remote. The art of wood carving in Bengal can boast a tradition no less ancient and constitutes, as it were, a parallel to terracotta sculpture to which, during the heyday of the terracotta temples, it bears a striking resemblance. Indeed, so closely do they agree as regards composition and subject matter as to suggest a deliberate pooling of techniques. In examining the products of either of these arts, it is often difficult to decide which of the two materials would have best lent itself to their execution. Were it not for the fact that the period during which the temples were built is clearly defined by the social and political changes noted above, it would be tempting to suppose that the wood carvings were the precursors of the terracotta reliefs. Here, however, it might be objected that, as a building material, wood was unsuited to this type of construction. Nevertheless in rural areas there may once have existed wood temples of which no trace now remains. Though formally, perhaps, more akin to classical temple architecture, these might well have already displayed stylistic and compositional elements such as those we have seen in the later decoration of the terracotta temples. Whatever the case, it may safely be assumed that the village temple played a large part in the perpetuation and preservation of Indian folk art.

Both as regards form and content, the repertoire of wood sculpture and wood carving is based to a very great extent on the tribal tradition we have already encountered in our consideration of comparable works in central India. The Santals, now become sedentary in the region under discussion, had recourse to wood carving in the figurative decoration of furniture, musical instruments and vehicles, in particular the litters used during the wedding ceremony. Even more widespread are ancestral and spirit figures, as also painted wooden masks. The art of the mask, originally the sole province of the tribal communities, would seem gradually to have gained a footing in the villages, a process which involved considerable formal and thematic changes. The original use of the mask for effecting magical transformations was gradually abandoned. Instead, it increasingly served to represent religious concepts or figures on the one hand, and local popular characters in plays and dances on the other. Here we need cite no more than one example of this form of Bengali folk art.<sup>84</sup> In Bagmundi and the surrounding localities in Purulia district, some two hundred craftsmen are still employed in the manufacture of such masks. These articles are used in *chau* dancing which originated in Seraikella in Orissa and was subsequently adopted in Bengal. It is one of the many traditional rural dance forms which are now experiencing a new lease of life in India. *Chau* dancing is characterized by its strong emphasis on the stylized gesture and the symbolic pose. Each dancer is required to wear a number of different masks, some with human and some with animal faces. Originally the masks were made of painted wood, but later on other materials were also employed, in particular clay and papier-mâché. The work was done exclusively by men whose skills were handed down from father to son, the

latter being trained in the craft from childhood onwards.

Considered in detail, the folk art of the north Indian region is of a richness that cannot be dealt with fully in a work such as this. Many of the examples we have cited in Bengal and Bihar could be matched in Uttar Pradesh. If we have to some extent ignored the latter, it is because so pitifully little research has hitherto been devoted to the folk art of north India's heartland, as opposed to the rich store of classical monuments of Indian art in Uttar Pradesh, by which we mean, not only the monuments of the imperial power of the Mughals and their predecessors, but also those of the present-day ceremonial centres of the Hindu religion.







# Southern India

# Folk Art in the Country of the Dravidians

Today the southern Indian region consists of four large Indian states, Karnataka (Mysore up till 1973), Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, to which should be added the former Portuguese colony of Goa. In the context of our survey of Indian art, this region must be seen as constituting, as it were, a synthesis of the general trends characterizing that art. Yet up till the colonial period, the political history of southern India, where the repercussions of the invasions from the north-west scarcely made themselves felt, evolved to a great extent quite independently of that of the north. Despite this fact, and despite the language barrier dividing the two parts of the subcontinent, southern India is nevertheless representative of the general course of Indian history and culture. From the earliest paleolithic times, it has remained, as it still remains today, the true bastion of Indian national character and Indian culture.

In our attempt to provide a general outline of the history of Indian folk art, we might equally well have arranged the chapters in such a way as to begin with southern India, this being a region in which traces of Indian civilization of the earliest periods are everywhere apparent. Instead, we chose to begin with the central Indian zone which, however, might in many ways be regarded as belonging to southern India, since the natural barriers between the two are less impenetrable than those further north. Indeed, there are none on the coastal strips

south of Orissa in the east and Maharashtra in the west, while the political lines of demarcation were for ever shifting from one region to the other in accordance with whatever historical dynasty happened to be in power. In the later chapters of Indian history it was Madhya Pradesh, the heartland of central India, which provided, as it were, an asylum or place of refuge.

From our present viewpoint—and it was this that determined the sequence of our chapters—the chief interest of southern India lies, not so much in the earliest remains of the past, as in the adaptability and continuity of an ancient, conservative and traditionally-minded culture which, being less vulnerable and less exposed, was therefore more persistent and vigorous than were the cultures in the northern parts of the country. We must rid ourselves of prejudice and avoid jumping to conclusions if we are to see things in their proper perspective, for prejudice may give, as indeed it frequently has given, rise to the belief that northern India is representative of the whole subcontinent merely because the languages spoken there belong to the Indo-European family. However, such subjectively emotive ideas of kinship should not be allowed to interfere with historical thinking, especially since it has long been recognized that the possession of a similar or even a common language does not necessarily imply relationship.

The apparent poverty of southern India, as compared with the rest of the country in re-

gard to the true folk art we have encountered hitherto, should not be allowed to prejudice us in favour of northern India. For if that apparent poverty be considered in historical perspective, it will be seen that, in the region under discussion, folk art was far more subject to the influence of court and orthodox temple art and hence to a process of integration. Consequently it is much more difficult to distinguish clearly between what is and what is not folk art, or to define the true nature of the latter. It is for this reason alone that southern India has been left to the last in our historical survey in which we shall note, but not attempt to assess, a synthesis that might be regarded by some as a success and by others as a failure endowed with little or no artistic merit.

Here it might, perhaps, be pertinent to recall a fact of considerable interest, namely that northern India did not acquire such eminence in the eyes of foreigners until, as mentioned above, the linguistic affinity between Greek and Sanskrit had been fully understood. Up till then, European travellers, merchants and missionaries—but not, be it said, Chinese or Arabian observers—had looked upon the south as India proper. Its precious stones and much coveted spices were exported in exchange for Roman gold. It was also the scene of the legendary empires and legendary wealth which we find described in the pages of the *Thousand and One Nights*. Again, it was here in southern India that the early colo-





nial powers, Portugal no less than France, first sought to gain a footing. The zeal of the Christian missionaries was expended here and it was thanks largely to these men that the region's Dravidian languages first became known in Europe. Northern India, on the other hand, was subject to the Mughal rulers and the Islamic priesthood during the early colonial period.

Hence it was small works of art, such as bronzes and wood carvings, which first made their way to Europe. In books written by travellers, both text and illustrations were primarily devoted to the south. Thus it was the well-stocked Indian pantheon and its often multi-limbed deities which chiefly aroused the curiosity of European readers and observers, inevitably reinforcing the idea of India, handed down by Antiquity, as a land of marvels. Many prejudices arose at this time, especially in the estimation of Indian religious practices. India was then considered, as it still is by many people today, as a land where religiosity was so extreme as to govern every aspect of life. Some dismissed this religiosity as abominable heathen superstition, while others acclaimed it as a deeply romantic and mystical spirituality. During the sixteenth, the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries, a period characterized by the thirst for knowledge and the dissemination of learning, idolatry was regarded as typically Indian, as was much else reported from southern India, for instance the sacred status accorded to the cow, the extremes of self-mortification practised by ascetics and the burning of widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands.

Hinduism, as we know it today, namely as the most common form of Indian religious belief, is, in fact, more firmly rooted and more widely diffused in southern India even though the seats of the principal gods are traditionally located high up in the ranges of the Himalayas on the northern border of the Indian subcontinent where, too, most of the holy places at which pilgrims gather are to be found. Through the northern plains run the sacred waters of the Ganges, on the banks of which lies Benares (now Varanasi), in the eyes of the majority of Indians probably the holiest place of all. Hinduism is, however, a highly stratified and exceedingly complex religion. Historically speaking, it embraces every phase of development in India, from religious thought born of magico-thaumaturgic beliefs to the most unalloyed theism, and from genuine scepticism to the most blatant forms of religious materialism. If it has one characteristic that is unique and inalienable, it is the quality of being rooted in and indissolubly bound up with India. To that extent Hinduism may, perhaps, be said to reflect the social developments and social changes that have taken place on Indian territory. It is a moot point, therefore, whether Hinduism should be regarded as having been determined by certain forms of belief or by certain social attitudes and modes of behaviour. On the one hand, Hinduism is infinitely tolerant and capable of integration, on the other, it has proved incapable of extending its sway beyond the confines of India.

The particular position occupied by southern India, like the particular characteristics of the region's art and, needless to say, of its folk art, must therefore be seen against the background briefly outlined above, a background in which the social development of India is indissolubly linked by historical ties with the much stratified and many-faceted religious beliefs which are subsumed under the term Hinduism.

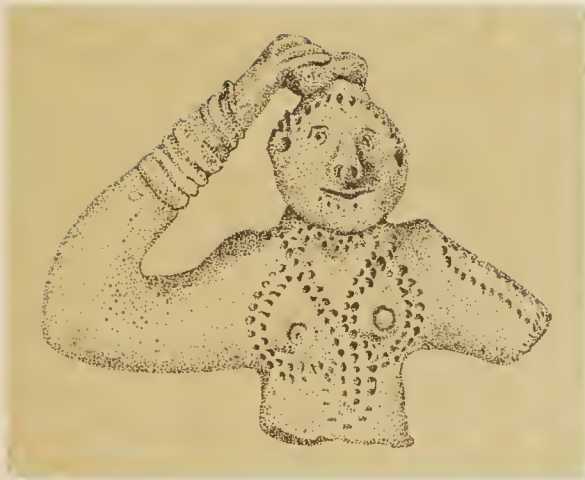


329 Zoomorphic funerary urn.  
Cuddapah, Tamil Nadu, Iron Age.

330 Royal seal  
of the Chola ruler, Rajaraja I. Southern India.

331 Ruler of the world with his symbols.  
Relief, Jaggayapeta. Andhra Pradesh.  
1st century A.D.





Within the large inverted triangle formed by the Indian subcontinent, southern India constitutes another similar, if smaller, triangle, in reality a vast plateau which, as the west-east course of its many rivers goes to show, falls away eastwards from the western Ghats. On the seaward side of these mountains is a fertile, if narrow, coastal strip. Isolated finds and numerous excavations have shown that there were human habitations in southern India in palaeolithic and neolithic times. However, in the now densely inhabited south-eastern districts, investigation of the earliest historical periods is extremely difficult and, as yet,

very far from complete. In southern India there have so far been no spectacular finds of art works belonging to those periods—discoveries, in other words, that might compare with those of the Harappan and local village cultures in northern India. However, it is altogether possible that the general picture of early Indian development has been distorted as a result of the imbalance that obtains in the sphere of archaeological research. Today we can gain a somewhat better idea of the north-south communications that existed as early as the Harappan period, for the south was a far more important source of raw materials, and possibly also agricultural produce, than was originally supposed. For instance there may have been an important coastal trade in which expensive raw materials such as gold were transported from northern Karnataka to areas further north.

It is only by degrees that the political history of southern India emerges from the obscurity that veils the centuries immediately preceding and following the beginning of our era. At a quite early date, we find inscriptions, the characters of which derive from the ancient Brahmi alphabet of the north, written in the Dravidian languages of southern India. While occasional historical allusions are found in later Vedic and Buddhist texts and a certain amount of geographical information may be gleaned from the authors of Antiquity, the most important earlier sources consist of contemporary Buddhist writings from India's most southerly outpost, Sri Lanka, of political and cultural independence since, at least, the Maurya periods. Our knowledge of south India is also supplemented by somewhat scanty snippets of historical narrative in the early epic poems, *Shilappadikaram* and *Manimekalai*, which date from the Shāṅgam era in Tamil Nadu. Here, three ancient dynasties are named, the Chera dynasty, the

Chola dynasty and the Pandya dynasty, but there are no archaeological remains that might bear witness to their architecture or to the former seats of these rulers. However, from an inscription in Orissa, dating from about the middle of the second century B.C., we learn of the export to the north of pearls and elephants from the Pandya Empire. At that time the territory of Orissa extended much further south than it does today. Indeed, it was one of the most southernmost districts which Ashoka, at the cost of enormous losses, attempted to conquer with a view to incorporating it in his Maurya Empire.

With the exception of the early Buddhist edifices of the Shatavahana, a dynasty which ruled from Pratisthana (now Paithan) in present-day Maharashtra and those of the Ikshvaku dynasty in Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh (about 200 B.C. to the fourth century A.D.), little or nothing is known of the region's more



**332** Terracotta figure.  
Nilgiri Hills, Tamil Nadu, 1st century A.D.  
height 11.5 cm.

**333** Lid surmounted by leopard.  
Terracotta. Nilgiri Hills, Tamil Nadu.

**334** Horse and rider.  
Terracotta. Nilgiri Hills, Tamil Nadu.



important architecture or of the sculptural embellishment that went with it. In the south the earliest Hindu temples with their rich carvings go back no further than the sixth century. These include the rock-cut temples and stone constructions of the Chalukya dynasty in Karnataka and, of somewhat later date, the buildings erected by the Pallava rulers at Tamil Nadu, of which the best-known are Badami and Aihole on the one hand and Mahabalapuram and Kanchipuram on the other, built between the sixth and eighth centuries. A search for traces of archaic folk art in southern India will be rewarded at most by the discovery of a few remnants of rock painting in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh and, somewhat further south, in the Edakal cave. However, there is as yet no consensus regarding the date of these particular paintings and engravings. Other material, of prehistoric but probably not very early origin, consists in village artefacts in the form of vessels and clay figurines. Mention has already been made in earlier chapters of the most important group in this category, discovered in the Nilgiri Hills in western Tamil Nadu. Less informative from the artistic and aesthetic point of view are other early earthenware products found in the south, in this case consisting mainly of simple, unpainted pots. The most impressive prehistoric remains in this area, namely funerary stone slab tombs known as megaliths, are, unfortunately, of little consequence so far as figurative representation is concerned. However, in view of the artistic importance of painting and sculpture in southern India from the sixth century onwards, it would seem exceedingly improbable that nothing of this nature had existed in the region prior to that date. Hence we can only suppose that the early witnesses to the art of southern India were constructed of material of a highly impermanent nature.

So far as southern India is concerned, and this applies particularly to its art, there are a great many questions which still remain unanswered. How, we may ask, for example, has it come about that, as compared to the north, the south should have proved to be a trustier custodian and a more articulate exponent of Hindu culture which, by general agreement, derives from the Brahmanic-Vedic culture of northern India? And this despite the fact that the Rigvedic Aryans, whose songs have bequeathed to us the earliest legacy of the Vedic culture, chose to make their home in northern India, an area which, to this day, has retained their language, while Dravidian, a wholly unrelated linguistic group, is spoken throughout the south. Why is it that the contrast between folk art on the one hand, and sumptuary court and religious art on the other, should be far less marked than in the north, although the influence and power of the ruling classes, as represented by the Brahmins and the warrior kings or Kshatriyas, were subject to fewer interruptions than was the case during the chequered history of northern India in which foreign invaders played so important a part? For all these reasons we might have expected to find in the south a more distinctive form of traditional folk art.

We must therefore ask ourselves why it is that the conservative south, intimately bound up as it was and is with the ancient vernacular cultural tradition, should have done so little towards preserving the formal and symbolic character of early Indian representational art, and have handed down to us so few prehistoric traditions by comparison with the north, a region constantly exposed to invasion and foreign influence up till the time of the Islamic conquest. The colonial era is, of course, discounted in this context, in that it affected both north and south alike.

Here our sole recourse must be conjecture, for much of what has been advanced by way of explanation has yet to be satisfactorily elucidated by scholars. If a solution is to be found to these problems, it is essential that we begin by ridding ourselves of the idea that the real history of India dates from the arrival of the Aryans.

Having demolished that fallacy, we may also dismiss an assumption that has hitherto remained unchallenged, namely that the north was the cradle of Indian culture from which that culture spread to the south. It will then be seen that the real heartland of the Indian subcontinent is the south, while the entire northern part of the country constitutes a borderland, a zone of contact with the outside world. A working hypothesis of this kind would enable us to disregard such matters as the stock of surviving monuments, the existence or lack of archaeological evidence. Rather, it would place the main geographic, demographic, linguistic and political factors governing India's cultural development as a whole in the context that would materially facilitate the solution of the questions posed above. If, then, we assume that the south—here understood as comprising the central Indian region discussed in our second chapter—is the essential hearth of Indian culture, we cannot but regard developments in the north, that is to say during the early political period of the Harappan culture and the earlier and later Vedic eras, as anything but secondary and derivative, more or less dependent on external influences. Nor, assuming that such was the case, would it be surprising if cultural change had taken place more rapidly in the northern zone, if, in their conflict with an alien cultural heritage, elements of the indigenous culture had proved better able to assert themselves and maintain their identity than had similar elements in southern India where continuity of devel-





opment was scarcely interrupted. In the north the early Indian cultural heritage was far more enduring than in the south and, at the beginning of the so-called historical era, assumed the character of an alternative vernacular culture that was rooted in tradition and contrasted strongly with the prevailing culture of the region. As folk culture, or rather folk art, it was proof against the constant changes that affected sumptuary classical art.

In the south, if our working hypothesis be correct, the course of developments would seem to have been totally different. If, as is often assumed, the south was merely a place of refuge for the indigenous culture driven out of the north, it would inevitably have become, as central India did in fact become, a general repository of aboriginal culture, and in that case must have retained far clearer traces, if not actually a rich store, of early northern representational art.

Southern India does in fact provide us with a number of indirect clues which point to the existence of a distinctive culture going back to prehistoric times, and which consist not so much in archaeological finds as in certain ancient and deeply rooted tradi-

tions. Amongst these we might cite what are patently the basic elements of an early matriarchal society, as well as local variants of a rural religion which, rather than being influenced by Hinduism, would seem to have imposed upon the latter certain characteristics of its own. In the south, too, the village would appear to have been the birth-place of political structures, the origin of which, as we have already mentioned, is largely a matter of conjecture. Much later on, around the middle of the first century of our era, they assume quite distinct forms, indicative of a long period of gestation. By comparison with the dynastic empires of the north, the empires of the Pandya, Pallava and Chola dynasties as well as those of the Chalukya, Hoysala and Vijayanagar rulers came into being virtually without external influence and experienced uninterrupted cultural continuity. Yet here too, contacts with other, albeit maritime countries abounded. From earliest times there is evidence of warlike expeditions, of the pursuit of an expansionist policy abroad, and of colonial aggrandisement eastwards and southwards. At the same time southern India, as a source of valuable exports, maintained widespread

trading relations with other countries. Her pearls, precious stones, textiles, ivory, elephants (used for military purposes) and, above all, spices have, since ancient times, been coveted by East and West alike.

Not a little of the region's wealth, constantly replenished by trading activities and the spoils of war, was diverted by the rulers into schemes such as the construction of the many temples built of dressed stone that are to be found everywhere in southern India. Along with their sculptural embellishment these temples, which date roughly from the period between A.D. 500 and 1500, and most of which still survive, may be said to represent the art of the region. Such is their dominance over town and country alike that all other forms of artistic creativity pale into insignificance beside them. The craftsman, whose trade was determined by his caste, and the village craftsman in particular, obviously had no difficulty in obtaining sufficient work from individual rulers, or from the warring dynasties that succeeded each other at comparatively short intervals.

Consequently the independent development of a distinctive village art as the complement of, or indeed in opposition to, court



and religious art was, in effect, neither possible nor necessary. Hence, so far as this period of south Indian history is concerned, there was an absence of the national and economic incentives which, in northern India, had clearly ensured the survival of an autonomous folk art.

We possess an account, which has chanced to survive, of the building in about A.D. 1250 of the famous Sun Temple at Konarak in Orissa. It throws light on an aspect of Indian artistic activity to which there are otherwise very few literary allusions.<sup>85</sup> Here we find not only repeated references to the recruitment of craftsmen from villages and small towns in Orissa, but also an explicit and detailed description of a group of *shilpis* or masons from Madurai in Tamil Nadu in the far south, whence they had been despatched by the local ruler to Konarak. At their destination these men proved capable of being assimilated into the existing craft system, though only under the most onerous conditions. Thus, while the social integration of the crafts evidently depended on the social conditions which obtained on the spot, we find here incontrovertible evidence of supraregional collaboration in the field of the arts. The architecture and sculptural decoration of the stone buildings erected by the Pallavas in Tamil Nadu and by the Rashtrakutas in Maharashtra, whatever their local peculiarities, possess common features which must primarily be attributed to a pooling of skills without which such technically ambitious projects could hardly have been realized.

In the case of painting, the situation would appear to be somewhat different. For whereas architecture was restricted in the main to the building of large stone temples, there is every likelihood that the tradition of wall and floor painting was upheld and practised in other fields besides that of ec-



clesiastical art, and that those who offered commissions to the local, professional artists outnumbered by far the religious patrons. Nor should we forget the work produced at home by non-professional women painters. Stylistically, the paintings in the Lepakshi Temple, one of the most important sixteenth century places of worship in Andhra Pradesh, are unmistakably related to the folk art pictures of the *chitrakathis* which we have already encountered in Maharashtra.<sup>86</sup> The flat treatment of the composition, the boldly drawn series of figures, the large eyes in a face presented in three-quarter profile with the far eye projecting beyond the outline of the head, the ornamental frames—these are but a few of the stylistic elements which may be cited for purposes of comparison and which have already been met with in the work of the Gujarati amateur miniaturists produced between A.D. 1000 and 1500. Many of these recur in the work of the amateur women painters of Madhubani in Bihar, who, however, like the *chitrakathis* of Maharashtra, dispense with the projecting eye, preferring

to accent the female profile by means of a conspicuously pointed nose and a nose ornament.

The stylistic similarities displayed by the paintings and stone reliefs of the Lepakshi Temple provide proof, indirect though this may be, that in southern India an ancient tradition immediately related to folk art has also survived independently. Hence it would be quite inadmissible to insist on the contrast between developments here and those in the north. Rather, the latter should be seen as being of a divergent and differently accentuated kind. The survival of a folk art related tradition is more clearly in evidence in the period of colonial rule which saw the decline of the native princes and, by extension, that of court and ecclesiastical art. At the same time it also helped to promote folk art for, with the rise of new social

[85] BONER, A. and SADĀSIVA RATH ŚARMĀ, *New Light on the Sun Temple of Koākra*, Varanasi, 1972, p. 66.

[86] RAO, A. G., *Lepakshi*, Hyderabad, 1969; RAY, E., "Documentation for Paithān Paintings", in: *Artibus Asiae*, XL, 4, 1978.



classes, new patrons came into being with the result that local artists and craftsmen were able to avail themselves of fresh opportunities to make a living and practise their skills. We shall discuss this form of art in more detail later on. For its strong religious overtones and continued adherence to cer-

tain conventions typical of the classical art of southern India do not readily permit of its being described as folk art.

First of all, however, we must consider the southern prehistoric traditions which have remained relatively independent of court and religious art, in as much as iso-

lated examples, dating back some hundreds of years, continue to exist alongside the many thousands of imposing village temples. The works in question consist in the main of statues of village deities, or *gramadevatas*, the majority of whom are female. They do not form part of the Hindu pantheon, although over the millennia both the Brahmin priesthood and the village communities themselves have attempted with varying success to incorporate them into that system. Essentially these village deities were malevolent spirits or demons who must be worshipped in the hope that they might undergo a change of heart and become, not so much the enemies, as the guardians of the villagers. It was a form of bribery or propitiation calculated to enlist the help of the village deities in preventing barrenness and disease, warding off and healing snake bite and ensuring that the harvest did not fail. The number of deities who might constitute a threat and therefore had to be propitiated, increased in proportion to the dangers by which a village felt itself to be threatened. In most cases, the presiding deity of a village was a goddess, though we encounter deities of this type whose importance is not confined exclusively to one locality.

Hitherto very little research has been devoted to the typology of these south Indian representations of village deities who were not necessarily always represented in anthropomorphic or zoomorphic form. Sometimes they were believed to inhabit unusually shaped or cursorily hewn stones, or even particular trees before which the appropriate ceremony of propitiation, in some cases involving blood sacrifice, would be performed. Figurative representations of deities were usually made of clay by local priests-cum-potters of low caste. The figures, either painted or unpainted, were relatively large, sometimes male, but far more



337 The village deity Aiyanar, mounted on a horse and attended by a watchman. Terracotta. Tamil Nadu.





frequently female, or might take the form of a mother and child. Animals were also represented. All such figures were set up in the appropriate places of worship. These south Indian clay figures are characterized by voluminosity of body and sturdiness of stance. The human figures are often supported on a kind of plinth. In the case of animals, the legs are frequently massive and cylindrical in shape.

The most widely distributed of these figurative representations is a male deity, supposedly the ruler of all evil spirits. He is known as Aiyandar or Ayyanar, though he also goes by a large number of other, local names. As protector and guardian he keeps nightly watch over sleepers and the fields, always providing that he has been accorded the veneration that is his due. He is frequently portrayed larger than life, as a rider

flanked by clay horses of which there are sometimes a great many, as well as by female figures believed to be his wives. Aiyandar may have owed his popularity and his superior status vis-à-vis the female deities to the fact of his having been identified with the great Hindu god Shiva, and so assimilated into the Hindu temple cult. One legend actually goes so far as to maintain that Aiyandar is the son of Shiva and,

338/339 Details of a temple car.  
Wood. Southern India.



strange to relate, of Vishnu, the other great male Hindu deity. It was, however, in his female guise as the bewitchingly seductive Mohini that Vishnu became the “mother” of Aiyanar.

The latter’s very close connection with horses is also worthy of note. In his capacity as nocturnal spirit-rider he recalls the equestrian figures of the Bhils and his cult is therefore associated with that of the spirit-rider.<sup>87</sup> There is much to be said in favour of the view that Aiyanar gradually emerged as a deity on the strength of ancient tribal beliefs. The depictions seen in the stone reliefs of Hindu temples and in south Indian medieval bronzes, known locally as elephant riders, suggest that Aiyanar was adopted into the priestly Hindu religion at a very early date. In India, as we have already emphasized on more than one occasion, the horse as a mount and as an attribute of Aiyanar, should always be regarded as secondary. In the north its occurrence was comparatively rare prior to the arrival of the Aryans, while in the south it would seem to have appeared even later, coinciding, as has often been supposed, with the so-called megalithic culture.<sup>88</sup> It is all the more surprising to discover how much popularity is attached to such equestrian pieces in the south, where not only court art, but also folk art gave pride of place to the horse, either with or without a rider. Later history also tells us a great deal about the esteem in which this creature was held in a country which cannot be regarded as its natural habitat. In the trade with western countries, horses were to represent one of the main imports.

[87] KRAMRISCH, S., *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribe and Village*, Philadelphia, 1968, pp. 52 ff. (Catalogue).

[88] LESHNIKI, L. S., *South Indian “Megalithic” Burials*, Wiesbaden, 1974, see esp. p. 260.

Our knowledge that the Vedic god Indra rode a horse is derived solely from literary sources, for in early art he is shown mounted on an elephant. Both these animals are symbols of royal status in early Buddhist art. In the popular culture of India, on the other hand, the horse would seem to have been regarded as an animal endowed with supernatural powers, as we shall find if we turn to the Indian folk tales. Here it figures as a singularly versatile creature, able both to speak and to fly, and which may, indeed, if treated aright, become a man’s protector and boon companion. From this we might suppose that it was precisely because of its unfamiliarity, its unusual qualities and its use by strangers, that the horse was accorded especial respect by the aboriginal population. Yet it was feared as much as it was admired. Hence it might quite reasonably be assumed that in the popular view the horse came to be, as it were, identified with the oppressor, the warrior king and interloper, and later with the monarch, his government and his oppression of the people. This would explain, not only the awed veneration in which the horse (and his rider) were held, but also and above all the desire to propitiate a being instinct with menace. To the Indian people the horse has never been a useful, familiar and pacific domestic animal, but rather a daemonic supernatural being which must be warded off and placated. Thus it will be seen that the horse may be used as a touchstone with which to distinguish between the culture of the people and that of the princely courts. In southern India where such distinctions are by no means clear-cut, this aspect of the horse may assume an especial significance.

If we are to search for evidence of further traces of south Indian folk art, we must take into account all those spheres of artistic activity that were regarded as subordinate or incidental to the sumptuary art of the dy-

nastic courts and of the great temple complexes of Brahmanic orthodoxy. They were spheres in which the popular artist had enjoyed a measure of latitude since the period of Brahmanic predominance and of absolute rule by the south Indian monarchs. This latitude increased with the arrival and establishment of the European colonial powers and the growth of the Indian middle classes whose newly acquired wealth enabled them to become patrons of village and village-related urban crafts.

Evidence of the infiltration of the ecclesiastical sphere by folk art is discernible not only in paintings such as those in the Lepakshi Temple, but also and more especially in the smaller products of the craftsman. Ample opportunities were provided here for the exercise of local skills such as small metal or wood sculptures, the manufacture of textiles for temple wall-hangings, for clothing the larger images of gods and for draping the wooden cars, often of great size, that were used to carry them in procession. Again, the village artisan was afforded very considerable scope by the demand on the part of pilgrims for simplified images of the large cult figures and for pictures of locally venerated saints, as also of the latter’s religious activities. But here, of course, the artist’s latitude was restricted by the necessity of adhering to the themes prescribed by the particular temple in the precincts of which he happened to work. Being expressly intended for pilgrims, these artefacts had to be designed for mass consumption and must not be unduly expensive. Hence this form of craftsmanship is chiefly characterized by the monotony of its subject-matter.

The inclusion of village crafts among the incidental requirements of the temple complexes, a tendency that was particularly marked in southern India, resulted in a heavy concentration of craft centres, many



of them employing specialized techniques and materials. Some of these materials would have been unsuited to the folk art of earlier times, even had they been available to the craftsmen concerned, while others would have been too rare and hence too costly. During the classic period of artistic development, for example, the casting in metal of large images of the gods ranked equally with stone sculpture. In earlier times ivory carving was also regarded as the sole prerogative of the prince and his courtiers. Thus the technical skills required in the working of such materials were not only to hand but had been fully perfected. It was not, however, until the first hundred years or so of the colonial era that the number of patrons and other interested parties began to grow, chief among them indigenous buyers, attracted mainly by religious subjects rendered in expensive materials. This led to what can only be described as an explosion in the demand for small objets d'art. Thanks to the presence of these customers and patrons, initially in the ports, coastal towns and administrative capitals, and later on in inland provincial cities and trading centres, the manufacture of such objects must have increased dramatically after the turn of the sixteenth century. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries doubtless witnessed a similar boom in the course of which, however, the nature of the goods produced underwent a marked change, for, as the number of Indian customers declined, production came increasingly to be governed by the tastes of the European rulers and their rejection of all things Indian. At the same time, as we have already noted, the demands of the European market and of the ever-growing number of tourists further contributed to the westernization of art. It was not until the present century that these processes evoked a reaction in the shape of an increasingly nationalist outlook on the

part of customers and producers alike, an attitude that has resulted in a revival of India's artistic traditions and of her folk art in particular. The processes which determined the course taken by the handicrafts and by folk art and which gave rise to what has now become a highly commercialized art industry, were not, of course, confined to southern India. We have already encountered similar manifestations in other parts of the country and have discussed them briefly in the appropriate context. Owing to the particular conditions obtaining in southern India, however, the above-mentioned processes, from their inception up till the present day, are not only more readily discernible there, but also perhaps more comprehensible.

And, indeed, it is from the viewpoint of the present day that we must continue our survey of the development of Indian folk art, a survey in which southern India forms the last step. For we have inevitably been led to the conclusion that what we have here is not so much the coexistence of the various forms and artistic expression—prehistoric, early historic and classical—but rather a marked process of integration in which all these phases and dissimilar stages of development have become merged into a whole, into a synthesis of Indian art. We should beware, however, of allowing ourselves to be swayed by what are primarily qualitative considerations and thus according undue importance to aesthetic opinions—led along aesthetic opinions of which the criteria are not those of Indian art. Pleasing though the Madhubani paintings of Bihar and the *kantha* embroideries of Bengal may be, we should not lose sight of the fact that, in historical terms, southern India has always possessed and still possesses those prerequisites that are essential to the continued development of Indian art.

Wood carving constitutes an important element in the art of this region. But

whereas in Gujarat it is used mainly as decoration for the outer walls of urban middle class houses, here in the south the earliest surviving statues and reliefs belong to the sphere of temple art. It has even been suggested that the stone temples of southern India are derivatives of earlier timber structures. That may well be true, but from the graves of the megalithic culture, for example, we have learned that the use of stone in southern India is of very early date. Indeed signs of a transition from timber to stone architecture are more evident in the north, where examples dating back to the Maurya period have been found at Pataliputra, as well as in certain Buddhist rock-cut temples in Maharashtra.

Of the abundance of still extant south Indian wood carvings few go back further than the sixteenth century. Hence it cannot be said with any degree of certainty that wood sculpture and reliefs were the precursors of stone sculpture. Indeed the reverse would appear to be true, for the simplified, readily understandable nature of the treatment suggests an art that is secondary and derivative. However, such reflections are of little use when it comes to determining the respective claims, either to pre-eminence or to antiquity, of the two techniques. For it must be remembered that the great majority of these wood carvings derive from the cars which were included in the inventory of the south Indian temples, and the manufacture of which must certainly have been subject to stringent regulations.

Every so often processions were held in which such temple cars were used to parade the gods before the people. Reference has already been made on several occasions to the significance of the car, as well as to the portable nature of the images and the mobility of zoomorphic figures. What we have here is an Indian tradition which may possibly derive from archaic village cultures









of the pre-Harappan period and may thus be regarded as a witness to this branch of artistic activity. Yet no immediate proof of uninterrupted continuity can be adduced, if only because wood cannot be numbered amongst those durable materials capable of withstanding the onslaughts of the Indian climate over a lengthy period. In view of the above, we are probably justified in assuming that earlier processional forms of worship had been adopted into the Hindu temple cult.

Given the above premises, the wood sculptures and reliefs used to embellish the temple cars appear in a somewhat different light. Moreover, there would seem to be every probability that the decoration of these wooden cars was entrusted in the main to village craftsmen whose work would have been familiar to the local population. Accordingly, neither the composition of the wood carvings nor their simple, readily comprehensible subject-matter can be seen as deriving from stone sculpture but should, like the paintings, rather be attributed to a separate branch of the same artistic tradition in which the artist is primarily concerned with the transmission of religious concepts by means that are comprehensible in visual terms. In this respect such wood reliefs should be associated with the same

folk art tradition as has already been noted in, for example, the early Buddhist reliefs. The picture scrolls of itinerant painters-cum-entertainers also belong in the same context. In terms of content the south Indian carvings are intimately linked with temple art and for this reason alone have sometimes been described as a simplified if not actually degenerate form of "high art". Such a verdict, however, is incompatible with the facts as we know them, nor was the process of adaptation always as one-sided as that verdict might seem to suggest for, at certain stages of its development, classical art deliberately departed from its own earlier traditions.

Wood carving, which may be regarded as a province of temple art to the extent that its repertory largely consists of religious themes, has come increasingly to dominate the south Indian market for art products, a process which began in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and still continues today. At the same time the greater refinement of forms and the use of expensive materials such as sweet-smelling rose and sandal wood serve as clear indications that the customers for whom the artisan is catering do not belong to the vast, untutored majority. Rather these products are designed for the more "elevated" taste of a

class of patrons intent on equipping their homes in such a way as to demonstrate the superiority of their social position. By comparison with the earlier, purely ecclesiastical, carvings, these later products are characterized by the sheer technical virtuosity now demanded of the artisan, a virtuosity which, however, is often conducive to the schematization and the aesthetico-artistic trivialization of the form of expression. High quality materials, once confined to articles produced for princes and the wealthier temples, begin to assume ever-greater importance, leading to an increase in the production of bone and ivory carvings. Though forms of composition and stylistic features deriving from the sphere of folk art still make an occasional appearance, they tend to become increasingly rare, while originality and expressiveness are wholly absent from a repertory which, while still to a large extent religious, is dominated by over-facile decoration and sickly sentimentality.

The most recent development in the sphere of wood carving is the transition to industrialized domestic production, a development that is now in full swing and, with government backing, is increasingly being directed towards the mass production of articles for markets at home and, more particu-



larly, abroad. Indeed, the craft tradition in southern India was, by its very nature, pre-disposed towards production of this kind for which it is now world-famous. As an example, we would cite the toy industry which is centred on Kondapalli in Andhra Pradesh but has also now become a characteristic industry of certain ancient temple towns, such as Tirupati and Tanjore. The domestic cult figures of yore are now relegated to the status of playthings for children, if not to that of mere instruments of instruction for tourists wishing to remedy their ignorance of the Hindu pantheon. Because of the enormous demand, most of these articles are now made of cheap materials—papier-mâché, for instance, being used as a substitute for wood. The result has been the emergence of a kind of pseudo-folk art, the themes of which purport to be closely akin to the folk art tradition. Thus the repertory comprises scenes and figures from the life of the people—peasants and fishermen, musicians and dancers, coolies and coconut pickers and, needless to say, fakirs and snake-charmers. In a region with an ancient and genuine folk art tradition of its own, a form of folk art imposed “from above” cannot but arouse alarm and despondency in the many amateurs and admirers of such things. However, the resultant products may quite often possess an aesthetic charm that is all their own, thanks to the manner of their execution and to a lively use of colour. Indeed, such is their freshness and restrained naïveté that they are infinitely preferable to many products of a similar nature manufactured in other countries.

No attempt should be made to compare the ivory, bone and horn carvings of the present day with earlier works produced during the colonial period, and still less with the few, even older, pieces discovered as a result of archaeological excavation. In India today some two thousand ivory carvers are said to

be engaged in the production, not only of figurines, but also of elaborate and very beautifully fashioned jewellery. Needless to say, these ivories from the Land of the Elephant are especially prized by foreigners who, however, are seldom aware that, even in colonial times, the artisan preferred African ivory to Indian, because less liable to splinter. Nor are the pieces by any means cheap. In India today most of the better work in this material comes from Kerala and Karnataka in the south, and consists for the most part in copies of classical models belonging to the sphere of temple art, the object being to emphasize the Indian character of the articles concerned. Yet despite the consummate skill of the ivory carvers and their strict adherence to detail, these commercially produced objects fail to do justice to the creative quality and the plastic excellence of Indian Classicism. Such ivories can lay even less claim than can the wood carvings to be regarded as the successors of the folk art tradition.

If we have dwelt at some considerable length upon the above-mentioned branches of India’s industrialized crafts today, it is because this tendency towards alienation and the impoverishment of subject matter—a tendency that goes hand in hand with technical perfection—is particularly in evidence in southern India. In all fairness, however, it should be pointed out that, in localities away from the big centres of production, the simple, authentic crafts still survive, wherever, that is, satiety on the one hand and foreign influences on the other have not led to a state of total indifference and artistic impotence.

A consideration of metalwork in southern India reveals that, in the period of classical Hindu art—and here the word classical is used in the timeless sense to denote the height of artistic achievement—sculpture in bronze, especially under the Chola dynasty,

attained a hitherto unprecedented degree of perfection. These Chola bronzes, in particular the image of the dancing Shiva and the graceful figures of the goddess Parvati, are rightly held to represent the culmination of India’s general artistic development, embodying as they do the country’s stylistic aspirations and artistic expressiveness, the harmonization of form and content and, finally, a technical expertise in the use of material and in the execution of figurative and decorative detail that is virtually unsurpassed. Thus, assessed in accordance with aesthetic and sumptuary standards, what we have here is a form of artistic activity with which folk art, in so far as it had any connection with metalwork in southern India, could not hope to compete, if only because of its structure which was socially and materially extremely limited. We need only recall the Dhokra sculptures of Bihar and Bengal to realize that any comparative evaluation would be inadmissible. Nevertheless, the restricted validity of such standards becomes clear when we consider that certain art lovers, disdaining material values, might well choose to possess and place on display, not a Chola image of Parvati, but rather a Dhokra elephant. Yet an objectively determinable distinction still remains, namely the contrast between relative poverty on the one hand and relative opulence on the other, between an art that caters for the most highly cultivated taste and one designed to meet the needs of the moment. In contrast to the extreme perfection of each individual Chola bronze we have a spontaneity that springs from the traditional reproduction of inherited forms. For the bronzes that belong to folk art are engendered not only by tradition but also by imaginative power and a love of experimentation. Such pieces are not necessarily schematic, nor are they by any means always devoid of individual artistic qualities.



Hence the essential difference lies in the unequal distribution of power and of wealth. Who, in the circumstances, would hazard an unbiassed judgment? In as much as every form of folk art is at a disadvantage—not in the artistic and creative but purely in the material sense—by comparison with classical art, any attempt at evaluation must necessarily be prejudiced. Such evaluation, moreover, must concern itself with the sculpture as such and not with the artisan who executed it. In a region of traditional craftsmanship there would be nothing to prevent a man from producing, in rapid succession, two quite different bronzes, one in the classical Chola manner, the other in the Dhokra style. The first would involve more time, money and material, the other considerably less, but at the same time would allow the craftsman greater independence and artistic licence. From a monograph published in 1962 we learn that in Tamil Nadu alone one hundred and nine families were engaged in producing bronze images of Hindu deities by the *cire-perdue* method.<sup>89</sup> R. Reeves, the author, provides a detailed description of this method of casting, at the same time stressing the spiritual, moral and religious aspect of the preparations which precede the actual technical and artistic processes. Here we again see at work those groups of craftsmen whose forebears created classical bronzes by the same method. Their repertory is still largely confined to images of the gods, and their work is still done in accordance with the ancient regulations prescribed by the Brahmanic manuals or *shilpashastras*. In this connection, mention might be made of a group of metal artefacts, many of early date, although by no means all of them qualify for inclusion in the category of folk art. The objects to which we refer are the typically Indian metal lamps of which the south is a noted producer. Many are given

figurative form. Thus the bowl-shaped reservoir containing oil and wick sometimes bears a strong relation to animal forms, predominantly elephants and birds, but may also take the shape of a female figure in accordance with what is evidently a tradition of considerable antiquity. Female figures bearing a small bowl-shaped lamp on head or shoulders occur as early as the Harappan period. Amongst the Hindus, Dipa-Lakshmi, the lamp goddess, plays a traditional role. Here the goddess of good fortune and domestic bliss is worshipped as the bearer of the lamp, the bowl of which is supported by her partially outstretched arms. While these lamps are especially characteristic of southern India, they are also to be found in other regions, including Gujarat. The various groups may be distinguished with comparative ease by the clothing worn by the female figures, which differs from region to region.

It may safely be assumed that the lamp was regarded as an indispensable accessory at a comparatively early stage of human society. Hence, in India as elsewhere, a small, simple bowl of baked clay must be regarded as constituting the earliest form of artificial light. Its further development, initially in the shape of terracottas, still remained within the competence of the professional and, perhaps, even of the amateur practitioner of domestic folk art. The use of the lamp in the religious rites of the temple was conducive, not only to a proliferation of types, but also on occasion to a degree of perfection which places certain of the Dipa-Lakshmi images on a level with the best figurative bronzes. Again, we learn from literary sources, and notably from Indian folk tales, of the high esteem in which the goddess Lakshmi was held in the sphere of domestic ritual. She brought light to the house and entered it, not only in the physical, but also in the allegorical sense. In the

colonial era, these lamps came to be much prized in every part of India. Most of them are now made of metal and produced by casting, the result being that this type of Indian lamp figures in almost every household inventory.

At this stage we propose to enumerate no more than a few types of lamp. Thus, for instance, Hanuman, the monkey hero of the *Ramayana*, who has become a popular household deity, may sometimes do duty as an oil lamp bearer. Lamps suspended on long chains are very common and may take the form of elephants, peacocks and *hamsas* (geese), these last being a borrowing from classical art. As in the case of the table-lamps, their purpose is either to diffuse light or to screen it. Other lamps consist of a number of small bowls carried on a system of branches or disposed in a semicircle on a horizontal plane.

Metal objects for domestic use are found in great abundance in southern India, but we do not propose to describe them here since to do so would be to repeat what has already been said about similar articles in Maharashtra. During the past few centuries metalwork, like wood and ivory carvings, would, so far as can be ascertained, appear to have been produced preponderantly in southern India. Metal articles from this part of the subcontinent are distinguishable by their formal conservatism and their close affinity to the ritual objects found in the inventories of south Indian temples to which they are also thematically akin.

Again, it is evident from the brass figures manufactured in Vizagapatam in Tamil

[89] REEVES, R., *Cire Perdue Casting in India*, Delhi, 1962, pp. 101 ff.

[90] ICKE-SCHWALBE, L., "Betrachtungen zur volkstümlichen Hindukunst in Südost-Indien", in: *Abhandlungen und Berichte des Staatlichen Museums für Völkerkunde Dresden*, 31, 1970.



Nadu, as for instance the skilfully fashioned riders, that secular court themes have been adopted into the repertory of metalwork. In the sphere of village craftsmanship we also find early motifs, such as demons and local deities, reproduced in metal. In so far as may be judged from the few pieces which have been illustrated or have otherwise come to our knowledge, what we have here is the application to metal of the traditions of earlier village terracotta sculpture. Once again the voluptuous, rounded and ample forms of the village goddesses recur, as do the figures of the Aiyandar cult.

At this point it should again be recalled that the *sati* stones and commemorative steles which we have already encountered in cen-

tral and north-west India, are also to be found in the south, more especially in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Here, however, the majority of the reliefs have been executed on a more ambitious scale in imitation of the temple art of southern India. The battle scenes depicted on these steles recall the friezes of monumental proportions adorning the great platform at Hampi and dating from the Vijayanagar period which witnessed the last great flowering of south Indian dynastic art.

It must have long since become apparent that, as compared with the regions of the north, we have found little to say about folk art proper in southern India. Instead we have had to confine ourselves to the discussion of works which may rather be said to belong to the sphere of the decorative arts. Such pieces deviate from those authentic forms of folk art already considered in previous chapters, if only because the materials employed are largely uncharacteristic of that art and no more than remotely reminiscent of its earlier manifestations. It is therefore highly significant that, in southern India, very few parallels have as yet been found to the work of women amateur artists of which we have been able to cite so many examples in the northern part of the sub-continent. All that we find here is the art of floor painting, known in Tamil Nadu as *kolam*. This art, which is as widespread as elsewhere in India, is aesthetically pleasing, while at the same time bearing witness to a form of religiosity that is thaumaturgic and propitiatory. On the occasion of the great processions, when the images of deities were paraded in the temple cars, it was incumbent on the women, even in the larger cities, to decorate the levelled ground outside their houses with *kolam* paintings, some of which might cover an area of no less than ten square metres. Even in purely physical terms this was no mean perform-

ance, particularly in view of the fact that the paintings had to be done twice over, once at sunrise and again before sunset. The work was carried out, not only by older women, but also by young girls.

This brings our survey back to the wide field represented by two-dimensional art. And here too, as in the case of sculpture, the influence of classical art and of the religious themes found in the art of the great Hindu temple complexes has severely curtailed the independence of Indian folk art, thereby greatly adding to the difficulty of accomplishing our appointed task, namely the elucidation of the products of that art. However, when citing the paintings in the Lepakshi Temple, we have already touched on the characteristics of south Indian two-dimensional art which, in this region, may be seen to diverge from the classical tradition, at any rate from the sixteenth century onwards.

In this context we would draw particular attention to a further example of south Indian painting which may be assigned with some degree of certainty to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. It is typical of a form of art which, while remaining outside the sphere of temple painting, is not wholly divorced from that genre. The example in question takes the form of a wooden shrine, fifty centimetres high, thirty-four centimetres wide and thirteen and a half centimetres deep, which is equipped with multi-leaved folding doors and, in addition, two pairs of single doors.<sup>90</sup> The doors may be folded back to reveal, resting against the rear panel, wooden images of the god Vishnu and two companions of smaller stature, Krishna and Rama, all three painted and decorated with appliqué work. The light wooden exterior is encased in thin linen, the whole surface being covered with paintings. The date and provenance of this piece can be established with a fair degree of accura-



342 Mounted figure.  
Brass. Vizagapatam, Tamil Nadu.



cy, for it was bought in Madras by a missionary from Halle in Germany, a certain Satorius, in 1733 and despatched to Halle in the following year. There it has remained to this day, in the former Orphanage of the Franckesche Stiftungen, as one of the exhibits in a cabinet of curiosities (called *Naturalienkabinett*) where it was used for educational purposes. The painted decoration is in a good state of preservation and this, having regard to the fragility of the material, would seem to suggest that it had not been used for any length of time before its shipment from India. On the other hand there is no indication that it was made specifically for Satorius. Hence we are fully justified in assigning it to 1700 or thereabouts. The carved images of the gods and the better part of the painted decoration reflect the late phase of classical temple art in southern India. What is of particular interest, however, is the purpose for which such cabinets were designed. They were the property of peripatetic Brahmans who employed them, not only in the performance of their private devotions, but also as instruments for the imparting of religious knowledge in graphic form to people drawn from various sections of the population. Amongst those so instructed were groups of Adivasis, a fact which may help to explain the unsophisticated character of these decorated box altars, a quality already plainly discernible in the paintings themselves, the overall treatment of the composition, and the readily comprehensible message they convey. L. Icke-Schwalbe very rightly draws attention to correspondences between these paintings and those of Adivasis such as the Saoras of Orissa, while similar comparisons might be made with the pictures of the *pat*-painters of Bengal.

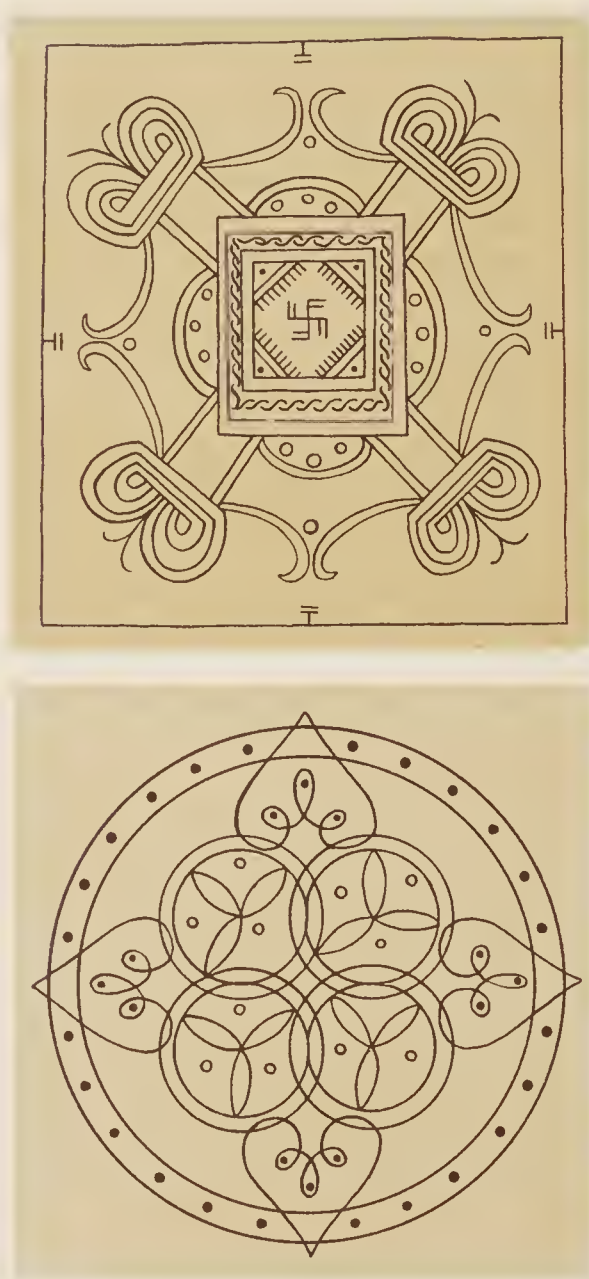
There are still too few specialized works of a kind that might enable us to gain a more accurate picture of these schools of painting

in all their local variants. However, it is becoming increasingly plain that there must have been large numbers of such objects which, being intended for popular consumption and suited to the needs of the Adivasis and the Indian country-dwellers, were, taken as a whole, representative of an independent popular tradition. The *chitrakathis* of Maharashtra, the *par*-painters-cum-entertainers of Rajasthan, and the *jadupatuas* of Bihar are among the groups who fostered this tradition, a tradition we

are only now beginning to appreciate and comprehend, thanks to some of the more recent publications referred to above. The folding box altars to which dates can be assigned are no more than very isolated examples of the work of another, in this case south Indian, school of popular painters-cum-entertainers.

If we compare the little that has so far come to light with the products of classical art, it is possible to establish some kind of criterion upon which to base our judgment. Thus it would seem to matter very little whether the subject matter of the picture scrolls is intended for tribal peoples or for Hindu, and in some cases even Muslim, villagers, or whether it is of an epic or primarily of a religious and didactic character. For it is not the subject matter that sets its stamp on this type of folk art, but rather the particular kind of picture language which, according to circumstances, is accompanied and made more comprehensible by a commentary in local dialect, by song, dance, mime and instrumental music. The archaic nature of this art is evident from the very multiplicity of the media—of which the picture is the chief—employed by the performer. The pictures, together with all the accompanying modes which underline the course of events and highlight the dramatic moments, are intended to convey an unequivocal message in as graphic a form as possible, regardless of the subject portrayed, whether it be the love of some heroic couple or the pranks of the youthful Krishna.

Relations between patron and artisans in the sphere of classical art were by no means as close as the social rapport that obtained between the itinerant painter-cum-entertainer and his audience. Constant personal contact was not possible, nor could it continue to prove effective, unless all concerned belonged to the same locality and were all more or less socially equal. Yet



343/344 Floor paintings  
executed by non-professional women artists.  
Kolam, Tamil Nadu.



membership of a caste was not always, as might be supposed, an isolating factor. The pictures on the folding box altars were expounded to the Adivasis by Brahmans, despite the stringent regulations banning outcasts from the very vicinity of these high caste Hindus. But even among Brahmans there were many sub-groups whose members lacked any form of financial security and might even eke out a living as wandering beggars. In the villages there were many opportunities for social intercourse between people of widely differing castes who, in the normal course of things, kept severely to themselves. Such opportunities arose on feast days and on the occasion of performances given by itinerant story-tellers when caste barriers were, at least for a time, partially if not wholly ignored. Here it might be pertinent to recall that, in the rigidly hierarchical societies of the great kingdoms of the Ancient Orient, it was the custom to invert the social structure, though not, needless to say, for more than a brief space of time, so that beggars became kings and kings became beggars. It is a custom which, in Europe, has survived to this day in festivals such as *mardi gras*. The obliterations and obfuscation of social differences on occasions such as these has always served as a safety-valve for social tensions which must otherwise have been suppressed. Theatrical performances of all kinds, but especially the peculiarly Indian popular entertainments which we have been at pains to characterize above, may certainly be classed among those necessary manifestations which permit the usual social distinctions to be ignored, abolished or even inverted, if only by way of a charade and for a strictly limited space of time.

The afore-mentioned folding box altars are but one outward and visible sign of southern India's "theatrical art" which we shall discuss at greater length below. If they already



feature at this point, it is because they also form part of the wider context of smaller south Indian paintings, many of which have been preserved, either singly or in series, in museums and private collections where, however, insufficient information is provided to enable them to be accurately dated. They consist for the most part of religious rather than genre paintings or portraiture, and are done on cloth or paper as well as on glass or mica. Unlike the miniatures of northern India and the Muslim kingdoms of the Deccan, which have been the subject of

increasingly detailed study, these paintings, despite their great diversity, have been sadly neglected, and it is only very recently that attempts have been made adequately to examine and classify them. Indeed, the dating of the afore-mentioned folding box altars might well provide a useful basis for stylistic comparison. At this stage, however, they may be said to represent, if in a very general way, the work of the artisan and, to a very great extent, also the folk art of southern India during the past few centuries. In addition, they increasingly bear witness to the secularization of south Indian art during the colonial period.

We shall now attempt to consider these more recent Indian paintings from a viewpoint which, in the opinion of many art lovers, has little or no connection with true art. Such an approach may well cause them some astonishment but, if we are to throw light on the specifically south Indian forms of folk art in terms of their historical development, we must adopt this course even at the cost of scandalizing our readers.

First of all it should be remembered that, in our attempt to sketch in broad outline the history of Indian folk art, we described the large, more or less self-contained group of archaic rock paintings as primitive art and, by extension, as authentic folk art. We now propose to make a mighty leap forward from these early manifestations to certain aspects of the Indian art of our times, though excluding for the moment the work of individual modern artists. By so doing we shall bring to the attention of connoisseurs an aspect of that art which has been largely overlooked and, indeed, seldom if ever included in historical surveys of the subject. We refer to the enormous growth of what has become a major branch of the art industry in India, namely the reproduction of pictures, at first by means of oleography and latterly by various modern techniques, which are sold to





the masses on a vast scale and at relatively low prices. Visitors to India since the turn of the century cannot have failed to encounter articles of this type which, numerically speaking, must be the most widely distributed form of folk art, in the literal sense of "art for the people". They are considered as kitsch, and even as cheap kitsch, for they are destined for mass consumption and exposed for sale in the bazaars and busy thoroughfares of the towns. They also not infrequently take the form of illustrations to indigenous publications such as books, magazines and calendars. In consequence such paintings have sometimes been described as "gutter" or "calendar" art, and have rated an occasional mention in travel books as a curiosity peculiar to India. Yet, as little as ten years ago, anyone who had seriously proposed to include these cheap, mass-produced articles in a survey of Indian art, would have been greeted with derision. In the meantime, however, voices have

been raised, albeit somewhat hesitantly, in favour of just such an enterprise.<sup>91</sup>

If we attempt to make an impartial analysis of these products now flooding the Indian picture market, we at once find ourselves faced not only by the question of how such a situation arose in the first place, but also by that of whether the pictures can be assigned to particular localities in India. Fortunately these are questions which can be answered without exhaustive research. For there can be little doubt that, in the first place at least, the pictures derive from southern India. Thematically and historically they are the successors to the groups of paintings previously mentioned in connection with the art of the colonial period and, as regards both style and content, should be seen in the same context as the folding box altars alluded to above. Thus, if all the paintings produced in southern India over the past four or five hundred years be considered as an entity, and the question of artistic merit

be left out of account, there should be little or no difficulty in drawing a comparison between that entity and the no less important output of northern India, an output which, however, displays different stylistic and thematic characteristics and derives from a different tradition.

During the second millennium of our era the history of painting in the north has been characterized by the art of the miniature, an art largely of court origin and without any real parallel in the south. For in this context the miniatures of the smaller Islamic kingdoms of the Deccan must be bracketed with those of the north Indian schools. Indeed, the tradition of miniature painting has persisted in the north from its classical heyday right up till the present time. For certain ar-

[91] VITSAXIS, V. G., *Hindu Epics, Myths and Legends in Popular Illustrations*, Delhi, 1977, Preface; GHOSH, S., "Defence of Calendar Art", in: *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 26 March, 1978.

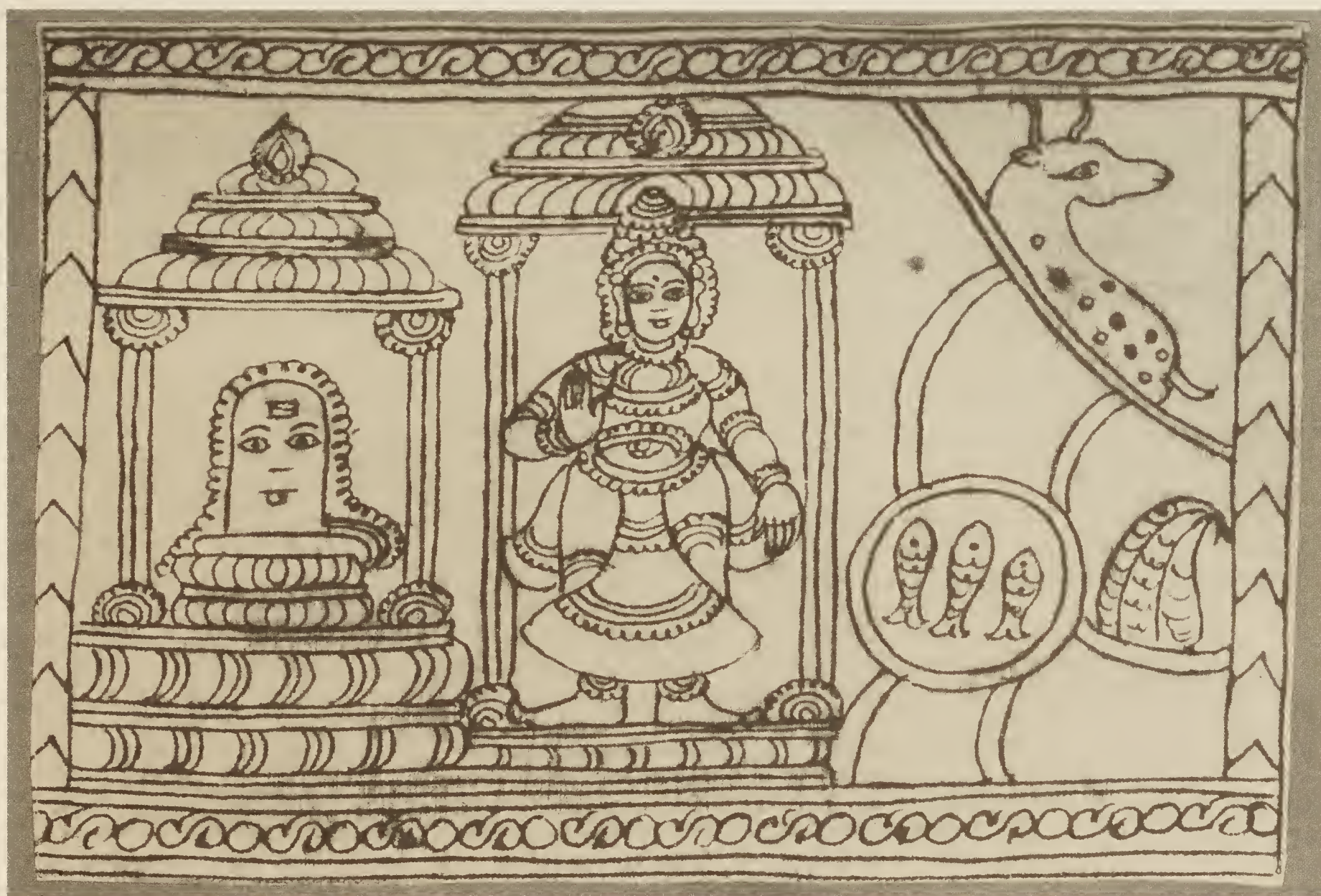


tists of the so-called Bengali renaissance, chief among them Abanindranath Tagore, deliberately turned for inspiration to the miniature painting of the Mughal period. Nor, as we have already seen in Rajasthan, is there any shortage of traditional artisans similarly intent on perpetuating local forms. Hence the northern and southern schools of painting may be seen as two distinct “streams”, at any rate so far as the past thousand years are concerned. It could therefore hardly be regarded as a coincidence that the south Indian artist, Ravi

Varma, one of the first to have made his name in recent times, should have had recourse to local traditions rather than those of the north Indian miniature in the endeavour to realize his ideas on renewal in the sphere of painting. Ravi Varma was employed as court painter at Travancore during the second half of the nineteenth century. While he may be seen as representing an art that was strongly influenced by the West, he was at the same time a conservative artist who not only drew on local tradition but also, and above all, borrowed

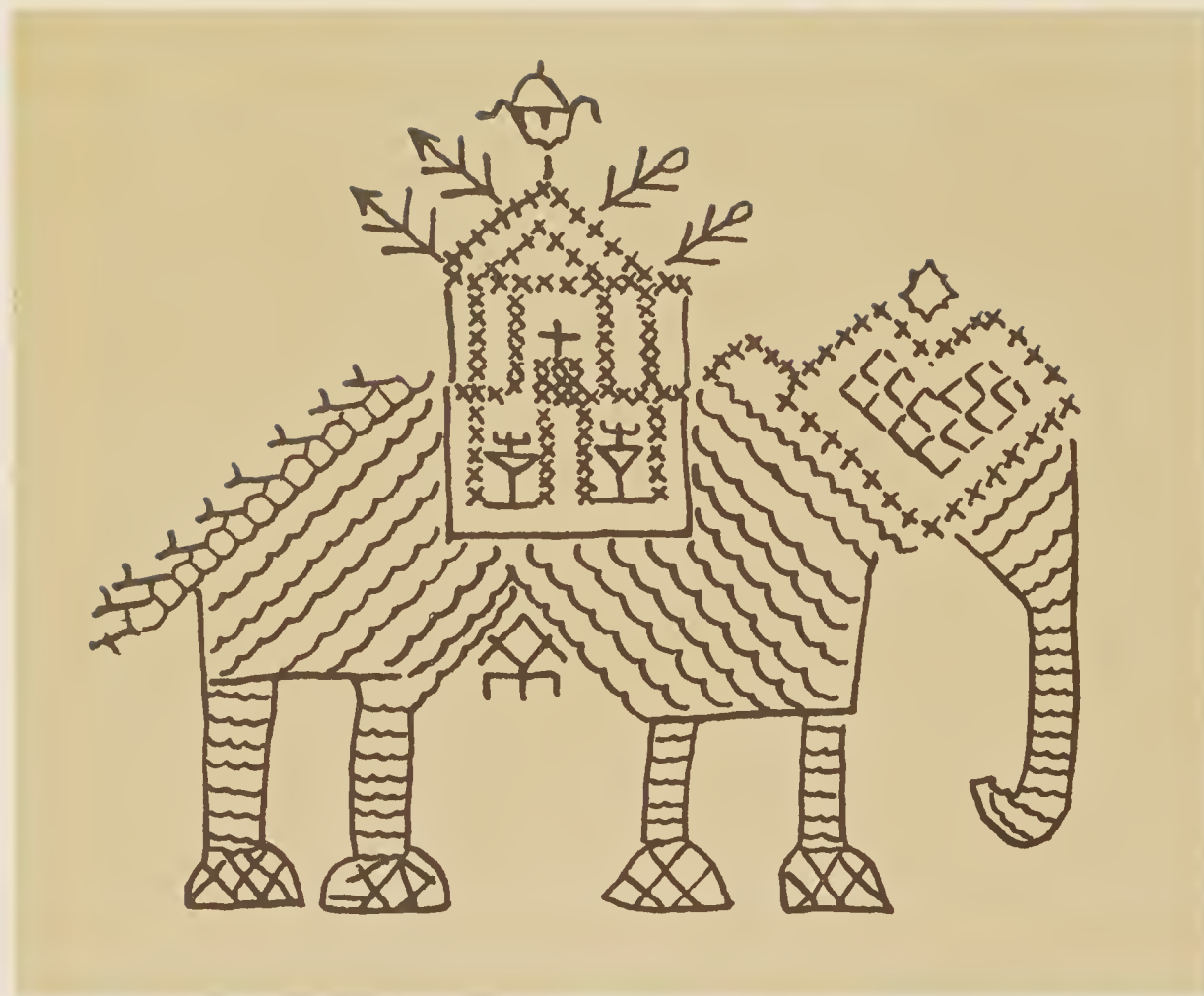
Hindu religious themes and adapted them to modern panel painting. It was he who produced the first sketches for what were to become typically south Indian oleographs. By “modern” we mean somewhere about the turn of the last century, a period which saw the appearance of the miniatures of Abanindranath Tagore in the north and the small-format paintings of Ravi Varma in the south.

In the early days copies of his sketches were produced in Germany and shipped back to India where they proved immensely popu-



348 Kalamkari drawing on cloth.  
Southern India, 25x35 cm.





lar amongst the diverse clientèle who patronized the market for devotional pictures. In course of time, the work of reproduction was taken over by Indian printers in, amongst other places, Madras and, subsequently, also in Bombay, while an increasing number of new artists began to produce the originals. The subjects, once of a purely religious nature, came to include genre paintings, idealized likenesses and portraits of local and foreign personalities, always with a view to meeting the requirements of an ever broader spectrum of customers. This flood of pictures has long since spread to all other parts of India. But what is of particular significance to us is the origin of that "gutter art", the fact that its roots lie in southern India.

It behoves us to note, however, that Euro-

pean and, in particular, English artists had a hand in more recent developments in the subcontinent. Though their pictures were commissioned by English colonial rulers, these artists nevertheless influenced their Indian counterparts, notably those who served either the same masters or else Indians seeking to emulate the latter. The work of the schools influenced by European art has come to be known as Company painting or drawing, that is to say, work executed in the service of the East India Company, and has not been extensively published until quite recently. From books on the subject it may readily be discerned that this form of art, too, was largely of south Indian origin.<sup>92</sup> In the second half of the eighteenth century the main centre was Tanjore, followed at a later date by Madras,

Trichinopoly and Pudukkottai. Thence, according to Mildred Archer, it spread to eastern India and, subsequently, to the north, though it did not reach the north-west until the thirties and forties of the nineteenth century. To this latter group belong many of the paintings on glass and mica, as also the most valuable examples done on ivory.

Seen from the perspective of the history of folk art, Company paintings might be said to mark a transition or, as it were, a bridge between past and present, even though, as mementoes, they are of a more or less transitory nature. However, since this form of art consists of an eclectic mixture of tendencies and styles, it also represents and fosters traditions which help to perpetuate certain elements of Indian popular painting as, for instance, in the composition and general concept of the picture, in the bold outline drawing of the figures disposed in rows across its surface and, finally, in the use of brilliant and contrasting colours. The subject matter is of secondary importance, although religious themes tend to predominate in the south, and everyday episodes from Anglo-Indian life in the north. Euro-





pean artists working in southern India might even depict Indian motifs such as, for instance, deities with several pairs of arms. But such paintings leave us in no doubt as to the artist's incomprehension of his subject of which he is therefore unable to give a credible rendering. A notable exception is the official painter, Etienne Alexander Rodriguez, who illustrated his very rare book *The Hindoo Pantheon*, published in

[92] ARCHER, M., *Company Drawings in the India Office Library*, London, 1972.

[93] "The Temple Art of Kalamkari", India Tourism Development Corporation, Bombay, in: *Tischkalender "India 1976"*; Homage to Kalamkari, *Marg*, XXXI, 4, Sept. 1978 (special issue).



Madras between 1841 and 1845, with a hundred and forty colour plates consisting of delightful copies, or rather impressions, of what were exclusively south Indian models. Here, stylistic elements borrowed from Indian folk art are blended with a naïve form of European perspective and plasticity.

Mention has already been made of the so-called *kalamkari* cloth-paintings in the chapter on the art of Gujarat. The real centre of the hand-painted cotton cloth industry was situated in the south, where the painting of large expanses of material was originally confined to the temple complexes near which the artisans had their abode. This technique, as well as the use of traditional dyestuffs, has now been revived in southern India where Kalahasti, near Tirupati to the north of Madras, is the best known centre of manufacture. Today little if any *kalamkari* work is offered for sale in the markets of the large towns. Instead, its place is increasingly being taken by printed materials which, while still retaining the older motifs, also display a very wide and imaginative range of new designs. A number of large *kalamkari* paintings signed by artists of the Kalahasti School have been reproduced in a recent publication.<sup>93</sup> One of them, measuring ten metres by three metres, shows scenes from the *Ramayana*; another, painted by Y. Gurappa, who is said to have inherited the art from his father, is decorated with pictures illustrating the second of the great Indian epics, the *Mahabharata*, in eight long, superimposed registers.

Here new life is breathed into the ancient art of Indian popular painting as practised by the painter-cum-entertainer, while at the same time tradition is strictly adhered to in the retention of such familiar stylistic elements as the row of figures depicting gods and heroes, mostly presented in profile and

disposed across the centre of a composition in which perspective and proportion are deliberately ignored. These large *kalamkari* cloths are, however, expensive and not intended, as is, say, *pat*-painting, for a clientèle drawn from the poorer sections of the population. Today they mostly find their way into the private collections of rich patrons or onto the walls of luxurious lounges in the large hotels catering for tourists. It is paradoxical that, in our time, mass consumption should be confined to cheap printed materials, the designs of which, aside from certain details and motifs, consist largely of borrowed rather than Indian stylistic and expressive elements, while age-old popular techniques should be revived solely for the benefit of the well-to-do middle classes or of wealthy customers from abroad. Such extremes are typical of the present day. For only a short while ago *kalamkari* cloths were hung in the temples for all to see, while the great picture scrolls of the *par*-painters of Rajasthan and of the *chitrakathis* of Maharashtra were displayed for the immediate entertainment of the people. We can only hope that the present state of affairs is no more than transitory and that one day the balance between the cost of folk art products and the purchasing power of the traditional consumer will be restored.

The chief pictorial media of our day notably television and the cinema, have chosen to include in their repertory and adapt to the roving eye of the camera the themes and styles peculiar to the oleographs and calendar art which we have already encountered in the form of printed reproductions. On the other hand, the more localized arts of the dance and the popular theatre, in so far as they make use of pictorial techniques, have been much less subject to change. Shadow theatre and puppetry, as well as the wearing by actors and dancers of masks and facial





and body paint, belong to an ancient and uninterrupted tradition of south Indian origin. Today these forms have met with an enthusiastic reception, not only throughout the whole of India, but also in countries far beyond its borders. These genuine forms of true folk art continue to be held in high regard and, where need arises, are further developed or revived as a form of culture worthy of deliberate preservation.

The most important and probably the oldest branch of art still practised today is that of the south Indian shadow theatre, of which the existence is attested by early Sanskrit writings. Indeed there still survives a thirteenth century text of one such *chaya nataka*, or shadow play, performances of which are believed to have taken place in the Sitabenga cave in north-eastern Madhya Pradesh, though this has as yet to be confirmed.<sup>94</sup> Another important literary source is a tenth century work by Somadeva who writes: "A shaubhika is a man who, in the

night-time, causes sundry persons to appear upon a curtain fashioned out of cloth." The expression *shaubhika* also occurs as early as the second century B.C. in the work of Patanjali, while a later, seventeenth century commentary contains a reference to the shadow theatre of southern India in which, we are told, "the fortunes of kings, ministers and other persons are shown in the form of leather figurines projected upon a translucent curtain".

A careful distinction should be drawn between the shadow play and the puppet or marionette show. In the former the figures, illuminated from the rear, are held behind a screen upon which their shadows are projected. The shadow play puppet is constructed of painted leather, and its various limbs are attached to the body with pieces of wire, while thin slivers of bamboo are used

to make it perform the desired movements. The head, however, is not jointed, being all of one piece with the body. The use of hide or parchment was rare in Indian art, at any rate during the period of Brahmanic-Hindu cultural development and was wholly taboo in performances that included religious themes. Since the material was considered unclean, tanners were either drawn from the lowest social strata or else were Mohammedans or foreigners, for instance Chinamen. In Calcutta the work was done by Adivasis, men of tribal origin and hence

[94] A general survey of the shadow play may be found in: DAS GUPTA, T. K., "Indische Schattenspielfiguren mit Affendarstellungen im Hamburgischen Museum für Völkerkunde", in: *Mitteilungen aus dem Museum für Völkerkunde Hamburg*, NF 7, 1977, pp. 53 ff., with comprehensive bibliography.



352 Head.  
Painted leather shadow-play puppet.  
Andhra Pradesh.

353 Tiger.  
Painted leather shadow-play puppet.  
Andhra Pradesh. 88 × 134 cm.

354 Bhairava, Shiva in terrifying guise with  
a snake. Wooden stele. Southern India,  
19th century.









355 Sphinx-like polymorphous creature.  
Terracotta. Tamil Nadu.





356/357 Musicians.  
Terracotta. Karnataka.





358 Snake woman. Wood. Tamil Nadu.





**359** Bust of a snake charmer.  
Wood. Kerala.



360 Maha-Lakshmi flanked by elephants.  
Wood relief. Tamil Nadu.















**362/363** Mother and child.  
Wood. Southern India, height approx. 22 cm.



**364** Gaja Lakshmi.  
Wood relief. Tamil Nadu, 23 x 11 cm.  
**365** Affronted parrots.  
Wooden door panel. Southern India, 64 x 16 cm.





366 Stylized buffalo. Wood. Karnataka.



**367** Animal-headed demon. Wood. Karnataka.



Following pages:

**368** Wooden figures. Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh.

**369** Rider.

Wood. Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, 22.5 x 13.5 cm.











370 Lamp in the shape of a peacock.  
Metal. Southern India, 15 x 17 cm.

371 Hair-pin for use in drying the hair.  
Brass. Kerala, 19th century, length 13.5 cm.

372 Hanging lamp in the shape of an acrobat.  
Metal. Southern India, 19th century,  
height 24 cm.

373 Hanging lamp in the shape of a bird.  
Metal. Southern India, 19th century,  
height of actual figure 45 cm.

374 Lamp-holder in the form of the  
monkey prince, Hanuman, Rama's helper and  
companion. Brass. Southern India,  
23.5 x 8.5 cm.

375 Lamp in the shape of a bird.  
Brass. Southern India, 33 x 12 cm.











376 Rider.  
Bronze. Southern India, 22 x 12 cm.  
377 Monkey and horse. Leather  
shadow-play puppets. Andhra Pradesh.





MONKEY  
குரங்கு



HORSE  
குதிரை



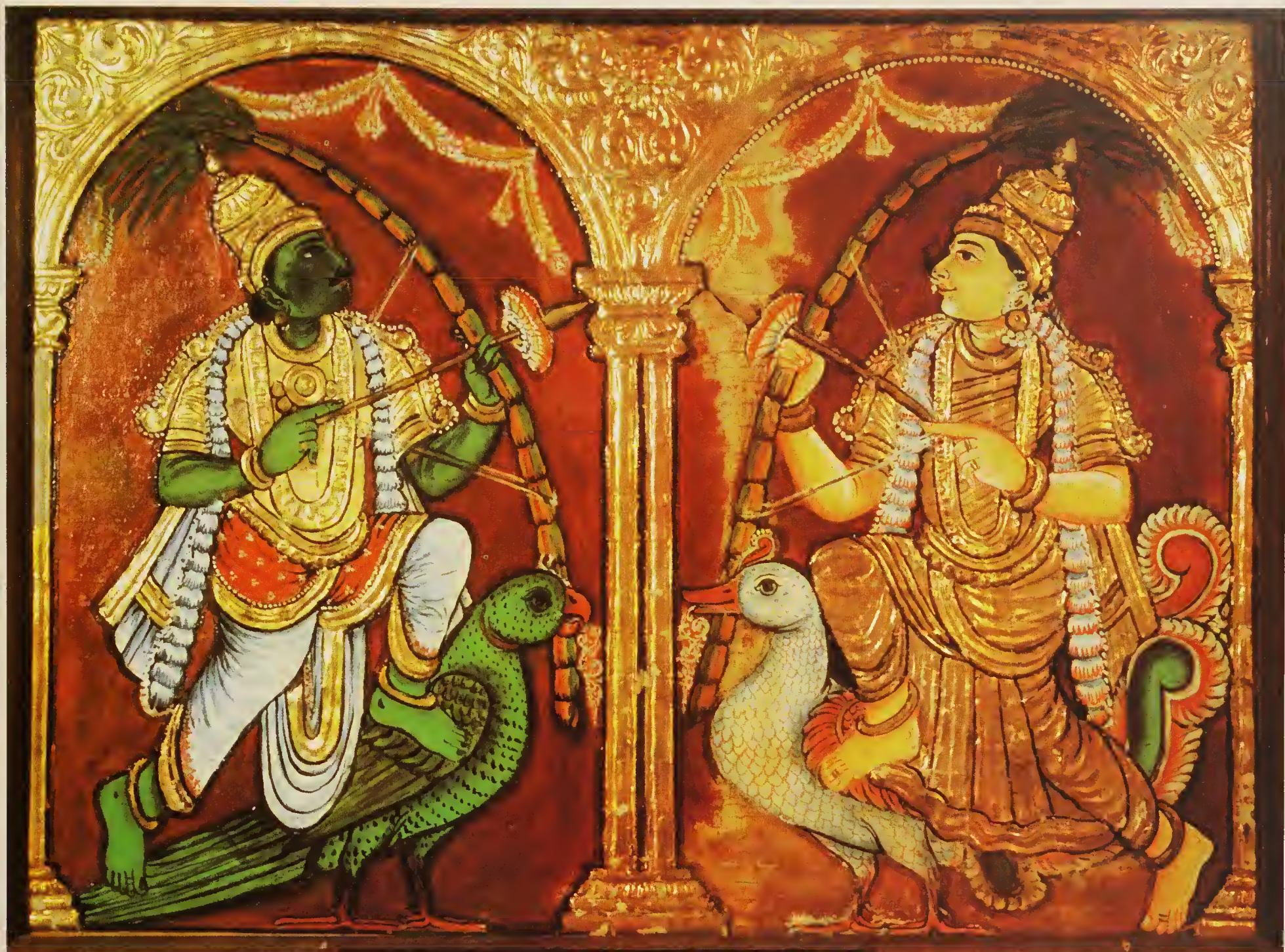
378 Gaja Lakshmi.  
Glass painting. Tanjore, Tamil Nadu, 37x25 cm.



379 Minakshi, the fish-eyed goddess.  
Painting on wood. Madurai, Tamil Nadu. 42x25 cm.







**380** The gods of love, Rati and Manmati.  
Painting on wood, Tanjore, Tamil Nadu, 60x45 cm.





**381** Myth of Markandeya.  
Glass painting. Tanjore, Tamil Nadu, 45 x 60 cm.

**382** Gaja-Lakshmi.  
Glass painting. Tanjore, Tamil Nadu, 19th century.









**383** Woman with sitar.  
Glass painting. Tanjore,  
Tamil Nadu, 58x40 cm.



**384** Loving couple.  
Glass painting. Tanjore,  
Tamil Nadu, 60x44 cm.



**385** Woman violinist.  
Glass painting. Tanjore,  
Tamil Nadu, 55x32 cm.





386 Loving couple.  
Glass painting. Tanjore,  
Tamil Nadu, 60x45 cm.









**387** Santhana Lakshmi.  
Painting on paper. Tanjore, Tamil Nadu,  
17x15 cm.

**388** Kalamkari.  
Painting on cloth. Madras, Tamil Nadu,  
25.5 x 34.5 cm.









389/390 Kalamkari paintings on cloth.  
Southern India, 25x35 cm.

391 Narasimha, an incarnation of  
Vishnu as an anthropomorphic lion.  
Kalamkari, painting on cloth.  
Southern India, 31x22 cm.





392–396 Portable box with representations from Krishna's life for painters-cum-entertainers. Painted wood. Southern India, first half of 18th century.

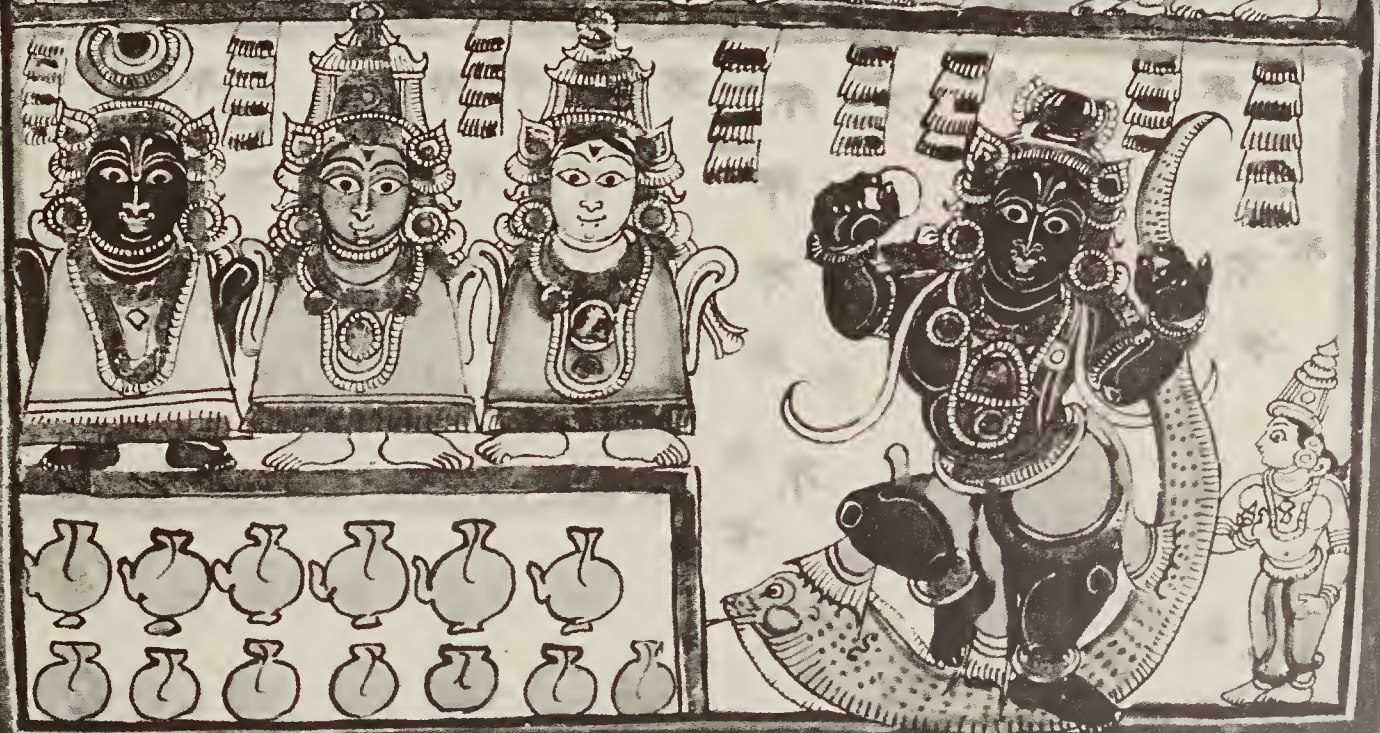


















without caste. However Hinduism was a determining factor during only one of the many periods with which we are concerned in this work. Hence it may be assumed that the painting and decoration of the tanned skins of flayed animals is of very ancient origin and, as an art, may perhaps be regarded as coeval with rock painting. Needless to say, no early evidence of this art form survives, yet in rock paintings we find representations of objects that might be interpreted as hides stretched out to dry.

The men who manipulate the puppets in the Indian shadow plays are known as *killekyatas* and are believed to have moved to the south from their place of origin in Maharashtra.<sup>95</sup> It may be assumed that Killekyata (also Kilikayata) in Karnataka, or Killekothu in Andhra Pradesh, is a key figure from whom the wandering entertainers derive their name. This personage is a malevolent goblin who is afraid of his female companion, Bangaraka (or Bangrakka), and tries to escape from her. Consequently he plays a leading role as a comic figure in the performance he has previously introduced. In the classical theatre of India the jester also occurs in the form of a *vidusaka*.<sup>96</sup>

Some of the factors enumerated above in connection with the south Indian shadow theatre, in particular the use of leather, the showmen's migration from central to southern India and their tribal characteristics generally, would seem to indicate an extreme antiquity antedating perhaps the

Sanskrit tradition itself. This, together with the survival of the art until the present day, would justify us in describing these entertainments as a genuine form of folk art.

Here, then, we have encountered another group belonging to the now familiar category of wandering entertainers, a category which, as we have seen, also comprises the *chitrakathis* of Maharashtra, the *par*-painters of Rajasthan, the *jadupatuas* of Bihar and Bengal and the predicant Brahmans, with their folding box altars, of the south-east Indian coastal region.

In central and, at a later date, in south-west India, the activities of the shadow play performers, like those of the other groups mentioned above, were and, indeed, still continue to be, directed primarily towards a rural population as yet unfamiliar with the written word. Based as they are on pictorial representation, these performances are calculated to overcome the linguistic difficulties peculiar to a country such as India where, for centuries, the multiplicity of languages has meant that preference must be given to visual rather than oral means of communication.

On the other hand we should never lose sight of the fact that all these activities were connected with the practice of a professional art as a means of livelihood and that, to the best of our knowledge, not only the performers but also the craftsmen who created the tools of their trade, belonged to the male sex. If all the above factors be taken into consideration, it becomes evident that, while these forms of art must have originated at an exceedingly early date, they do not in fact go back as far as prehistoric times. For if itinerant groups of specialized craftsmen and entertainers exercised their profession for the benefit of wide sections of the population, it can only be assumed that their activities began no earlier than the period between the Harappan culture and

the historical era. This is supported by the *killekyatas'* myth of creation which establishes a link between their own beginnings and the events described in the *Mahabharata*. On the other hand, the early Buddhist carvings on the lintels of the stupa gates at Sanchi are regarded by some as a translation into stone of painted picture scrolls. Such an interpretation would seem highly plausible when considered in conjunction with the painters-cum-entertainers, the shadow play performers and the peripatetic Brahman preachers we have cited above. Indeed, it would seem more than probable that Buddhist monks made use of pictures in transmitting the teachings of the Buddha to the populace. This would take us as far back as, say, the middle of the first millennium B.C. and, indeed, further still if, as may be supposed, such Buddhist monks were drawing on an even earlier tradition of visual communication.

Thus we have identified and, we trust, adequately documented two distinct traditional streams, one represented by a non-professional art carried on by women in their own homes for the benefit of their families, the other by what might be called a masculine art, restricted to professional craftsmen. What is surprising about this is that these streams which, over long periods of history, pursued a parallel course, should have been based on two-dimensional art. For it is painting rather than sculpture which has proved to be the true sustainer of the folk art tradition, whether such painting be executed on the floors or the walls of houses, or on light, readily transportable materials such as skins, textiles and the like. Thus, as the precursor of this tradition of two-dimensional art, rock painting and engraving fits perfectly into the overall pattern of development. Indeed, in support of our reconstruction of the history of two-dimensional folk art we are able to cite material that is

[95] THIEME, P., "Das indische Theater", in: KINDERMANN, H., *Fernöstliches Theater*, Stuttgart, 1966, p. 32; RAO, M. S. N., "Leather Puppetry", in: *Lalit Kala Contemporary* (undated), 11, pp. 35-58.

[96] THIEME, P., "Das indische Theater", in: KINDERMANN, H., *Fernöstliches Theater*, Stuttgart, 1966, p. 38. The author maintains, however, that the jester is unknown in the Indian shadow play.



not only attested but readily accessible. Again, in the light of later developments and of well-tried working hypotheses, we may also invoke a mass of circumstantial evidence in the shape of, say, mats and other plaited articles and early woven goods and paintings of an ephemeral type, of which no definite traces now remain.

Masks, which we have already encountered in the tribal art of central India as indispensable adjuncts of the Bengali and Orissan *chau* dancers, are also of some importance in southern India, particularly where the arts of the theatre and of the dance are concerned. Here we find two notable characteristics – on the one hand the strikingly garish colouring, and on the other, the marked flatness of those parts of the mask that surmount the face and protrude on either side of it. Instead of wearing masks, the *kathakali* dancers of Kerala paint their faces in a highly stylized manner, but to such good effect as almost to obliterate their natural features. In addition to paint, panels made of perishable material are worn on either side of and above the face in order to make it seem larger. The eye of the beholder is continually drawn to the head, and that head, in the form of a genuine mask, continually presents the image of the figure to be portrayed. It is of no little significance that, like the movements performed by the puppets in a shadow play, the pseudo-masks of the *kathakali* dancer should be restricted to a single plane from which plasticity and the third dimension are almost totally excluded.

There is ample evidence, which need not be cited again here, to show that the art of the mask is of great antiquity. What is highly significant, having regard to the two-dimensionality of Indian folk art discussed above, is that, unlike masks elsewhere, which are often given plastic form, the Indian article is notably flat. In this respect there is, as we

have already pointed out, a resemblance between the circular flat masks of the Bhils in Rajasthan and a similarly flat mask found at Kalibangan and therefore dating from the time of the Harappan culture. Here we should again mention the tribal masks frequently encountered in central India, which resemble boards held vertically in front of the face. Two-dimensional masks and face paint would invariably seem to complement each other. Nor are the spirits and demons impersonated by tribal dancers free of this emphasis on the two-dimensional.

At this point it might be pertinent briefly to recall a hitherto somewhat neglected if constantly recurrent peculiarity of Indian art and of Indian classical sculpture in particular, namely the strong emphasis placed on the head and the tendency to enlarge the latter by means of head ornaments. As we have just seen, this characteristic also recurs in two-dimensional form, both in the early mask and in the face-paint and partial mask worn by the *kathakali* dancers. Such accentuation of the head is also noticeable at any early date in Harappan terracottas and to an even greater extent in those of the Maurya and Shunga periods. The classical Buddha images of the Gupta period also display this peculiarity in particularly effective form. In these figures the head is surrounded by an unusually large nimbus, the flat expanse of which is in strong contrast to the three-dimensional plasticity of the figure as such. These brief remarks are simply intended to draw attention to certain tendencies which would seem to indicate that two-dimensional art may, indeed, not have been without influence upon sculpture in the round. This is not to detract from the sinuous, if not actually voluptuous, forms favoured by Indian classical sculpture. But it is precisely such proven anomalies as these, of which many more examples could undoubtedly be cited, that enable us to appreciate the im-

portance of the role played by two-dimensional art in the development of Indian art as a whole. Accordingly, it is possible to provide at least some indication that two-dimensional art, sustained by the great and ancient traditions of folk art, has repeatedly brought its influence to bear on Indian classical art.

Thus, Indian art as a whole, embracing as it does both the popular and the classical traditions—the former known to us partly from attested sources and partly from hypothetical reconstructions, the latter from works already long familiar to the art-lover—may be seen to be at once old and new, in as much as it is at one and the same time rooted in tradition and directed towards the future. Taken all in all, therefore, Indian art may be regarded as a valuable witness to the artistic creativity of mankind throughout the great epochs of human cultural development, but also and in addition, as a special and, in its own way, unmistakable monument to all the achievements of the past, a source of lasting creative inspiration and an indispensable contribution to world culture.



# Appendix



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Jacket front:

Painted fruit representing the three gods of the Puri Temple in Orissa. Photo: Peter Franke, Leipzig.

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**Alpona (aipana)** Work of non-professional women artists in almost all districts; see also floor-painting 59, 60, 176, 196, 225, 226; **13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 325, 351**  
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**Balarama** God, brother of Jagannath, i.e. of Krishna 94  
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**Bangaraka (Bangrakka)** Consort of Vidusaka 297  
**Banjara** Tribal group in Rajasthan 168; **250**  
**Barakhan Gazi** Bengali Islamisized tiger rider and tamer 190  
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**Bhopa** Painter-cum-entertainer 167

**Bhunga** Type of house in Gujarat **204**  
**Bishahari** Local snake deity in Bihar 196  
**Block printing** A process employed for the decoration of textiles, usually cotton; see also kalamkari 122  
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**Cire-perdue** A method of metal casting; also known as lost wax 100, 101, 256  
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**Devnarayankipar** Folk epic retailed by painters-cum-entertainers in Rajasthan 167

**Dhokra technique** A method of casting similar to cire-perdue, mainly practised by metalworkers in tribal districts (Bihar, Bengal, Madhya Pradesh) 101, 233, 234, 235, 237, 255, 256; **104, 113, 311, 312**

**Dikara** Local term for folk painting in Kumaon 228

**Dipa-Lakshmi** Lakshmi, the goddess of good fortune, as a lamp deity 256; **290**

**Dipavamsa** Buddhist chronicle in Sri Lanka 179

**Diwali** Lamp festival celebrated throughout in honour of the goddess Lakshmi 175

**Domestic tutelary deity** See Hoi, Lakshmi

**Dove goddess** 36

**Durga** One manifestation of Shiva's consort, better known as Parvati or Kali; see also Minakshi, Sanjhi 167, 192, 232; **219, 235, 247, 285**

**Dussehra** North Indian annual festival in which huge, ephemeral sculptures play a part 233

**Earth goddess** Appears in early Indian texts as Prithivi 185

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**Folding altar** or **folding box** Decorated receptacle used by south Indian painters-cum-entertainers 257, 258, 259, 260, 297; **392, 393, 394, 395, 396**

**Footprints** In folk art these denote the presence of a deity 174, 175, 196; **14, 15, 16, 17, 45, 317**

**Gadia Lohar** Caste of blacksmiths in Rajasthan 168

**Gaja-Lakshmi** Lakshmi flanked by elephants paying homage **324, 364, 379, 382**

**Ganesha** God of wisdom, the elephant-headed son of Shiva and Parvati 120, 167, 196; **111, 195, 211, 216, 248**

**Ganga** River goddess with, for mount, Makara, a composite sea monster **218**

**Ganjifa** Indian card game 112; **46, 114**

**Geometrical motifs** (e.g. cross, double cross, triangle, trefoil, circle, wheel, rectangle) 48, 109, 112, 121, 124, 167, 228; **70, 184, 185**

**Glass painting** Typical feature of the colonial period in southern India 124, 262; **379, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386**

**Gond** Tribe in central India 59; **81, 96**

**Gramadevata** Village deities, southern India, usually malevolent 51, 249

**Gutter art** A term used for mass-produced pictures 262

**Hamsa** Divine bird in Indian mythology, possibly a swan or goose 256

**Hands, palms of, painted** See menhadi

**Hanuman** Monkey prince in the *Ramayana*, Rama's friend and helper 256; **374**

**Harijans** Children of God, as Gandhi dubbed the outcastes of India 226; **327**

**Haugaiyan** Floor painting in the Pahari tracts 176

**Hoi (Hoi Astami)** Domestic tutelary goddess in the Pahari tracts. Also a local manifestation of Durga, depicted as a rectangle or house 174, 175, 232; **254**

**Hollow figurine** Characteristic Indian sculptural form 109, 117, 172; **78, 79, 163, 164, 165**

**Hrusso** Population group in north-east India **142**

**Indra** Aryan god of heaven 115, 196, 251

**Ink-well** Indian version of a European utensil 101, 165; **108**

**I-shaped motif** A repeat pattern found in rock art 46; **61, 62**

**Ivory carving (ivory painting)** 252, 254, 255, 256

**Jadupatuas** Painters-cum-entertainers in Bengal and Bihar. Magic painters in Hindu villages, catering for the tribal population 93, 188, 189, 191, 227, 258, 297

**Jagannath** Deity in Puri Temple, manifestation of Krishna 53, 56, 94; **116, 117**

**Jaina (Jainism)** Religion named after its founder Jina (Mahavira) 52, 116, 165, 179, 185, 186; **225**

**Jaipur marbles** Stone sculptures from Jaipur in Rajasthan 168, 184, 252

**Jhunti** Floor painting 56

**Kainkuya** Branch of the Mal caste in Bengal 235

**Kalamkari cloth** Hand painted or printed cotton cloths from Gujarat and Indhra Pradesh 122, 263; **347, 348, 388, 389, 390, 391**

**Kali** The Terrible, a manifestation of Shiva's consort 192; **105, 303**

**Kalighat pat** Simple paintings done on paper 193, 195, 227, 260; **43, 44, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272**

**Kamar** Traditional caste of potters 237

**Kammadeva** God of love 174

**Kansa** Bell metal, an alloy of copper and tin 235

**Kantha embroidery** Complex embroideries on old pieces of cloth, carried out by Bengali women in their homes 120, 176, 225, 234, 252; **293, 294, 318, 319, 320, 321**

**Karshapana** Very early Indian coin 184, 185

**Karttikeya** God of war, also known as Subrahmanya, a son of Shiva 173, 174, 196

**Kasar (Chasia)** A caste of metal workers 101

**Kashmir shawl** A well-known woolen product of Kashmir, with a characteristic pattern 176

**Kaskut** Metal alloy with high zinc content, also known as yellow metal 101

**Kathakali dancing** Traditional south Indian dancing, typified by the costumes and face paint worn by the performers 298

**Kathi** Tribe in Kutch or Saurashtra 120

**Kathi embroidery** A local form of embroidery in Gujarat, often inset with mica or small pieces of mirror 120, 121

**Kayashtha** One of the higher Hindu castes 226, 240; **22**

**Khambha** A figurative stele commemorating a hero in Gujarat. See also stele 117

**Killekyata** or **kilikayata** Shadow theatre performer in Karnataka 297

**Kindly virgins** South Indian village deities; see grama-devata

**Kohbar** Nuptial chamber, fitted out for the wedding ceremony 226

**Kol** Tribe in Bihar 59; **90**

**Kolam** Floor painting in southern India 59, 257; **343, 344**

**Koli** Tribal population on the north-west coast of India 124

**Korku** Tribe in central India 99; **191**

**Krishna** Highly popular pastoral god 93, 94, 120, 166, 167, 176, 190, 193, 227, 234, 257, 258; **24, 88, 106, 195, 237, 299/300, 326, 394, 395**

**Kshatriyas** Indian warrior caste 182, 246

**Kumar (also Kumbhakar)** Caste of potters 100

**Kutya Konds** Tribe in Orissa 101



**Labyrinth** Pictorial symbol 46, 112; **187**

**Lakshmana** Rama's younger brother, one of the three Puri temple deities; see also Puri pat 196

**Lakshmi** Consort of Vishnu, goddess of good fortune and domestic bliss; see also Alakshmi, Gaja-Lakshmi, Dipa-Lakshmi 60, 175, 195, 196, 256; **14, 15, 16, 17, 275, 302, 324**

**Lamp deity** See Dipa-Lakshmi

**Lamps (oil lamps)** 101, 256; **111, 370, 372, 373, 375**

**Likhnu** Floor painting in Himachal Pradesh 176

**Lock** In India, locks were often elaborately decorated 165

**Lord of the Beasts** Early sobriquet of Shiva **170**

**Madhubani painting** Earlier known as Mithila painting in Bihar, confined exclusively to non-professional women artists 226, 252; **22, 303, 304, 305, 322, 323**

**Mahabharata** Ancient Indian national epic 60, 179, 180, 239, 263, 297

**Maha-Lakshmi** Another name for the great goddess Lakshmi **360**

**Mahavamsa** Buddhist chronicle in Sri Lanka 179

**Mahavira** See Jaina

**Makara** A composite monster or fish-cum-crocodile, mount of the river goddess Ganga **218**

**Mal** Caste in Bengal 235

**Mali** Artist-craftsmen in Bihar 196

**Manasa** Snake goddess, sister of the great snake god Sesha; see also Bishahari 196; **118, 276**

**Mandana** Floor painting in Rajasthan 59, 172

**Mandapa** Wooden shrine, richly decorated for ritual purposes 165

**Manimekalai** Early south Indian epic 245

**Manmati** God of love **380**

**Marai** Goddess of destruction **90**

**Marias**, also **Bison-horn Marias** Tribe so named after their striking headgear 95

**Markandeya** Indian sage, famed for his longevity **381**

**Marriage** (houses, nuptial chambers, pictures, postcards, vedi, seats, kohbar) 174, 227; **19, 22, 23, 76, 309, 310, 316**

**Mask** 46, 95, 241, 263, 298; **98, 131, 133, 192, 193, 194, 289**

**Matani pachhedi** Temple cloth of the mother goddess 124

**Mehr** Tribe in Gujarat 120

**Memorial stele** See stele

**Menhadi** Painting of the palms and soles of the feet, a fashion among women in present-day India 172; **253**

**Metalwork** See Chola bronzes, cire-perdue, dhokra, kansa, kaskut

**Mica** A glittering material, used for the decoration of textiles 120, 121, 262; **301**

**Minakshi** Fish-eyed goddess, south Indian form of the great goddess and consort of Shiva **378**

**Miniature painting** Practised in northern and central India (second millennium A.D.). 39, 116, 121, 124, 167, 172, 248, 260, 261

**Mohini** Female manifestation of Vishnu 251

**Morung** Men's dormitories amongst the Naga 95

**Mother goddess** A very ancient goddess of prehistorical times. Her characteristics were later assumed by Durga, consort of Shiva 51, 110, 117, 124, 167, 174, 175, 185, 186; **148, 149, 219**

**Mountain deity** In certain localities, mountains were regarded as gods. They were also the seat of the most important deities, notably Shiva 185

**Mudrarakshasa** Play in Vishakadatta (c. 5th century) 93

**Naga** Name of numerous tribes in the extreme north-east of India 53, 95, 185

**Nagas** Snake-like beings, often composite demi-gods who live in rivers 118, 185, 186

**Narasimha** Vishnu as man-lion, one of his manifestations **391**

**Nathdwara painting** School of painting in Rajasthan, see also pichwai 166, 167, 168; **233**

**Nath Jogi** Tribal group in Rajasthan 168; **250**

**Navagunjar** Polymorph consisting of nine parts 94

**Nut cutter, nut cracker** Decorated utensils of the colonial period 101, 165; **121, 122, 123**

**Oraon** Central Indian tribe 100

**Ossan** Floor painting in Orissa 56

**Pabujikipar** Popular epic retailed by the painters-cum-entertainers of Rajasthan 93, 167

**Pahari goddess** Deity in the shape of a house; a local form of Durga 172, 173

**Painters-cum-entertainers** See bhopa, chaya nataka, chitrakathi, folding altar, jadupatua, killekyata, paithan, shaubhika

**Paithan-painting** Pictures executed by the painters-cum-entertainers of Maharashtra 60, 93; **91, 92, 93**

**Palankin or palki** Litter 172, 173

**Palm painting** See menhadi

**Panel painting** The painting of pictures on wood is a comparatively late manifestation, possibly deriving from the West **379, 380**

**Par-painting** Folk painting 93, 166, 167, 188, 189, 258, 297; **231, 232**

**Parvati** Shiva's consort; see also Durga, Kali 196, 227, 255; **246**

**Pat-painting** Folk painting on cloth or paper 93, 94,

167, 193, 228, 240, 263; **87, 88, 89, 119, 140, 249, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272**

**Patha** Local term for folk painting in Kumaon 228; **324, 326**

**Patia** Term for Gujarati representational stele; see stele

**Patua** See also pat-painter 188, 189, 192

**Phulkari silk** Silk with floral embroidery, manufactured in the Punjab 176

**Pichwai-painting (pichawai)** Painting on cloth and, subsequently, on paper. Term also embraces wall painting and a school of painting in Rajasthan 166, 167; **233**

**Pictorial motifs** See chauk, coin symbol, footprints, swastika, trident, yoni triangle

**Pipal tree** Sacred fig tree beneath which the Buddha found enlightenment. Ancient symbol displaying typical leaf configuration 112; **181**

**Pir** Strictly speaking an ancestral spirit. Also a tiger-rider who wards off importunate tigers 190

**Pithora** Deity or deities of the Bhils 117; **207, 208, 209, 210**

**Playing cards** See ganjifa

**Polymorph** Fabulous creature made up of disparate parts. See also composite animal, makara, narasimha, navagunjar, saravan 111, 120; **234, 235**

**Puri pat-painting** Folk paintings executed for, amongst others, worshippers at the Puri Temple in Orissa 94; **117, 119, 139, 140**

**Puspaka** Sacred car which travels through the air 196

**Rabari** Community in Gujarat 120; **202, 205**

**Radha** Krishna's deified beloved 227; **237**

**Rama and Sita** The chief protagonists, both deified, of the *Ramayana* 196, 257

**Ramayana** Along with the *Mahabharata*, the most celebrated early Indian epic 60, 94, 167, 179, 239, 256, 263; **267**

**Rangoli** Floor painting in Maharashtra 56, 59, 176

**Rati and Manmati** Divinities of love **380**

**Rattle** One of the earliest percussion instruments **164, 165**

**Religious motifs** See ceremonial car, hamsa, makara, navagunjar, puspaka, saravan, vahana

**Representational steles** See stele

**Rigveda** Earliest Indian collection of poems 32, 113

**Ritual dancing** See chau, kathakali

**Ritual representations** See also bull-vaulting, dancing 110; **27, 39, 67, 68, 69**

**Rock art** May be painted, engraved or incised 8, 23, 45, 46, 48, 49, 95, 100, 106, 110, 114, 184, 195, 228, 245, 259, 297; **24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 65, 66, 67, 69**



**Rumal** Cloth or handkerchief from the Pahari tracts. See also chamba rumal 172, 215

**Sanjhi** Local north Indian goddess. As Shiva's spouse she is also regarded as a major goddess 232; **245**

**Sanjhi art** The art of paper cutting which had its origins in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh 232, 233

**Sanjhi wall reliefs** In Uttar Pradesh the Sanjhi goddess is often depicted in the form of a triangle 232, 233

**Santal** Tribe in Bihar and Bengal 93, 94, 173, 189, 190, 191; **309, 310**

**Santhana-Lakshmi** South Indian form of the goddess Lakshmi **387**

**Saora painting** Tribal painting in Orissa 48, 54, 56, 59, 172, 173, 258; **134, 135, 136, 137, 138**

**Sarasvati** Goddess of music, speech and learning **323**

**Saravan** Composite creature found in Puri pat-painting 94

**Sati (suttee)** Self-immolation of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre 96, 117, 173, 257; **200**

**Shadow play** See theatre art

**Shadow play puppet** See also theatre art **352, 353**

**Shara** Flat clay bowl with painted decoration manufactured in Bengal 195; **302**

**Shaubhika** In early Sanskrit literature a painter-cum-entertainer in the Gangetic states 264

**Shaving knife** Implement used by Indian curriers for smoothing leather **120**

**Shilappadikaram** South Indian epic poem of the early period 245

**Shilpashastras** Orthodox Brahman textbooks containing artistic precepts 33, 180, 256

**Shilpi (shilpin)** Skilled building worker 33, 248

**Shiva** Along with Vishnu, the principal god of the Hindu religion 52, 177, 196, 227, 250, 255;

**101, 192, 215, 244, 246, 354**

**Shri** Term of veneration; also name of deity, e.g. Shri Lakshmi 175

**Sikki** Species of grass used in basketwork in Bihar 233, 234; **298**

**Sitala** Goddess, warder off of smallpox 233

**Sitar** Musical instrument **383**

**Spirit rider** Local deity of the Bhils 101, 114, 117, 177, 251

**Stamp seal** Form of seal produced during the Harappan period. The image was obtained by stamping rather than by rolling as with the cylinder seal of the Near East 105, 110, 124, 172, 177, 185, 188; **180, 330**

**Steatite seal** Produced during the Harappan period; see also stamp seal 108, 110, 111; **169, 175, 180**

**Stele** General term for a carved upright memorial slab usually of stone; see also khambha, patia, sati 96, 99, 101, 117, 118, 257; **190, 191, 200**

**Stone sculptures** See also Jaipur marble **155, 186, 191, 235, 236, 261, 262, 263**

**Stupa (thupa)** Buddhist funerary mound. The first stupas were built to house relics of the Buddha 52, 118, 187, 297

**Subachani** Goddess, the duck-mother **315**

**Subhadra** Goddess, sister of Jagannath, i.e. of Krishna 94

**Sujani embroidery (Sujni)** Folk embroidery produced in Bihar, similar to the kanthas of Bengal 120, 176, 225

**Swastika** Hooked cross of early Indian origin, possibly symbolizing a whirlwind or the sun. Also employed in all-over designs 46, 112, 228; **29, 59, 60, 63**

**Tattooing** Among the Kol tribes only women are tattooed 168, 176, 185; **188, 250, 251, 252**

**Temple car** See ceremonial car

**Temple cloths** Printed or painted cloths, usually of cotton, used for ritual purposes; see also textiles 122, 124, 167, 251, 263; **214**

**Terracotta figurines** Objects mass produced in the villages of the early period and at the time of the Harappan culture 48, 49, 100, 101, 105, 107, 108, 117, 184, 185, 195, 237, 238, 240, 241, 257, 298; **36, 37, 55, 77, 107, 148/149, 150, 157, 158, 163, 164, 165, 197, 198, 199, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 290, 333, 334, 337, 355, 356/357**

**Terracotta temples** Constructed in a manner peculiar to Bengal and employing terracotta bricks in place of building stone. The exterior walls are clad with ornamented bricks 165, 195, 238, 239, 240, 241

**Textiles** See appliqué work, arshilata, bayton, chakalo, chamba rumal, kantha, Kashmir shawl, kathi embroidery, phulkari, rumal, sujani, temple cloths 118, 119, 120, 122, 167, 225, 233, 251, 297

**Theatre art** A feature of southern India 259, 263, 264, 297, 298

**Toda** South Indian tribal community in the Nilgiri hills 50

**Tree deities** Goddesses inhabiting trees; see also vrikshakas 117, 185, 186; **262**

**Trefoil motif** A motif consisting of three lobes, as in a clover leaf 119; **186**

**Trident** An attribute of Shiva 112

**Universal ruler or Cakravartin** Displays the attributes of Vishnu, i.e. club, discus, snail shell, etc. **331**

**Utensils (decorated)** See banam, betelnut container, ganjifa, ink-well, litter, lock, shara, shaving knife

**Vaghri** Wandering tribe akin to Gypsies 124

**Vahana** Seat upon which a divinity sits, sometimes

a throne, but also the figure of an inferior being, such as an animal, a demon or a man 174

**Vedi** Marriage altar 173, 174

**Vidusaka** Jester in a classical Indian play 297

**Vishnu** Along with Shiva, the principal deity of the Hindu religion 93, 175, 196, 251, 257; **106, 391, 393**

**Vithoba** Local form of Vishnu/Krishna **106**

**Vrikshaka** Tree deity 186; **262**

**Wall decoration** May consist of plaster, mud, shells, paper, clay or painting 48, 54, 59, 93, 116, 119, 121, 122, 172, 176, 177, 226, 228, 229, 248, 297; **80, 81, 135, 139, 179, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 245, 303**

**Warli-painting** Named after the Warli tribe 48, 56, 59, 60, 122, 172, 173; **20, 21, 85, 86**

**Wheeled animals** The horse, elephant, tiger and tortoise are typical examples of this Indian form 49, 101, 108; **94, 95, 107, 115, 158**

**Wood-carvings, wood sculptures** 94, 95, 96, 99, 116, 117, 124, 165, 176, 177, 229, 237, 241, 244, 251, 252, 254, 256; **127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 222, 224, 225, 227, 228, 240, 248, 308, 338/339, 340, 341, 354, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 368, 369**

**Woodcut** A late form of folk art dating from the colonial period 193; **273, 274**

**Wooden funerary stele** See stele

**Yadupatua** Painters-cum-entertainers from Bihar and Bengali villages who painted pictures for the tribal population 93, 189, 191, 227, 258, 297

**Yakshas** Male or female demi-gods. Though they sometimes assume monstrous form, they are often kindly to man 53, 118, 185, 186

**Yama** God of death 93, 196

**Yantra** Esoteric priestly cult 176

**Yoni triangle** Form commonly taken by the yoni or female sexual symbol 46; **64**

**Zamindar** Big landowner 240

**Zoomorphic** Representing or imitating animal form 49, 109, 112, 120, 121, 188, 196, 249

**Zoomorphic capital** Capital in the form of an animal or part thereof 184, 187











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